

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 260 516

EA 017 965

AUTHOR Swaim, John; Needham, Richard
TITLE In Search of Excellence: The National
Reports--Implications for Middle Schools.
INSTITUTION National Middle School Association, Columbus, OH.
PUB DATE 84
NOTE 59p.
AVAILABLE FROM Publication Sales, National Middle School
Association, P.O. Box 14822, Columbus, OH 43214
(\$5.95; quantity discounts).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Change; Educational Development;
*Educational Improvement; Elementary Secondary
Education; Government School Relationship;
*Intermediate Grades; *Middle Schools; National
Programs; Politics of Education; *Reports; *School
Effectiveness

IDENTIFIERS 100 Good Schools; Action for Excellence; *Excellence
in Education; Nation at Risk (A); Study of Schooling
(A)

ABSTRACT

This monograph examines recommendations and concerns raised by recent reports of the National Commission on Excellence in Education and other organizations and considers the possible ramifications for middle school education. The monograph is organized into five sections. The first provides an overview of the following five studies: "Action for Excellence," "High School," "A Nation at Risk," "A Place Called School," and "One Hundred Good Schools." Section 2 is a more specific treatment of the implications of these reports for middle schools. It consists of observations by four middle school educators who were involved with the reports: Conrad F. Toepfer, Jr., "Accent on the Positive: What Is Really Effective in Today's Education"; Bruce Bombacher, "Beyond the Rhetoric: Actions and Implications for the Practitioner"; Craig M. Bowman, "Educational Improvement: A View from the Trenchers"; and James P. Garvin, "Common Denominators in Effective Middle Level Schools." Section 3, "Achieving Educational Reform" by Daniel J. Burke, is a strong and pointed statement regarding the role educators should play in creating educational reform. Section 4 provides concluding remarks regarding the whole issue of middle school education and the prospect of educational change. The final section lists commission reports and studies of schooling, as well as documents and journal articles that give reactions, critiques, and summaries. A biographical note on the authors is included. (TE)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED260516

IN SEARCH OF EXCELLENCE: The National Reports - Implications for Middle Schools

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY
HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

H. Gaddis

John Swaim,
Richard Needham
and Associates

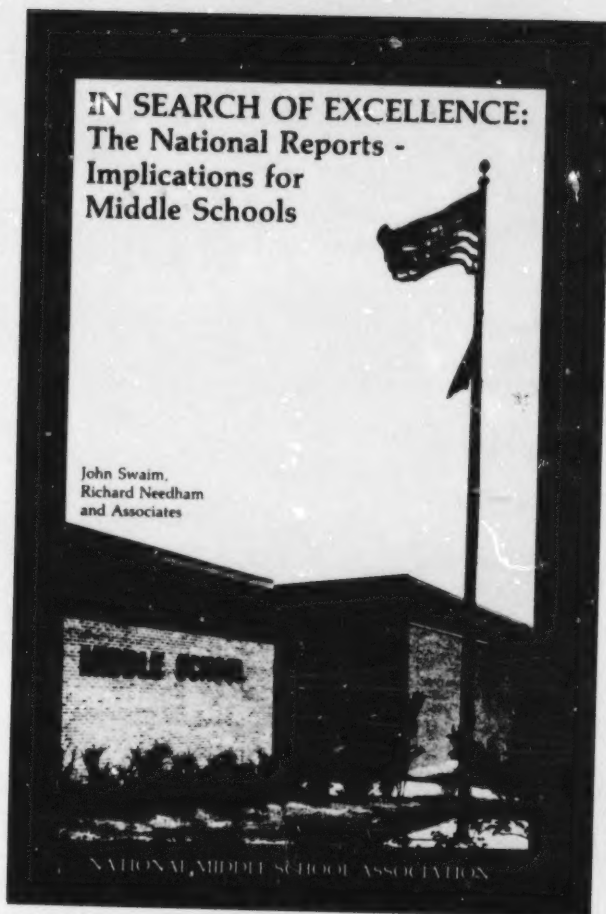
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."



EA 017 965

**IN SEARCH OF EXCELLENCE:
The National Reports -
Implications for
Middle Schools**

John Swaim,
Richard Needham
and Associates



NATIONAL MIDDLE SCHOOL ASSOCIATION



**NATIONAL
MIDDLE
SCHOOL
ASSOCIATION**

Copyright © 1984 by the National Middle School Association
P.O. Box 14882, Columbus, Ohio 43214

\$5.95

Discounts available on quantity orders
to a single address

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means without permission in writing from the publisher except in the case of brief quotations embodied in reviews or articles.

The materials printed herein are the expressions of the authors and do not necessarily represent the policies of NMSA.

Printed by Omni Press of Macon, Inc., P.O. Box 6555, Macon, Georgia

Cover photograph by Jim Fagerburg of Heery and Heery

Contents

FOREWORD	IV
INTRODUCTION	I
SECTION I.	
AN OVERVIEW OF SELECTED STUDIES OF EDUCATION	3
Action for Excellence: A Comprehensive Plan to Improve Our Nation's Schools	
High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America	
A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform	
A Study of Schooling	
100 Good Schools	
Overview of States' Responses to the National Studies	
SECTION II.	
REACTIONS TO THE STUDIES AND THEIR EFFECT ON MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION	13
Accent on the Positive: What is Really Effective in Today's Education Conrad F. Toepfer, Jr.	
Beyond the Rhetoric: Actions and Implications for the Practitioner Bruce Brombacher	
Educational Improvement: A View from the Trenches Craig M. Bowman	
Common Denominators in Effective Middle Level Schools James P. Garvin	
SECTION III.	
ACHIEVING EDUCATIONAL REFORM	35
Power, Politics and Leadership: the Missing Link Daniel J. Burke	
SECTION IV.	
CONCLUSIONS	44
SECTION V.	
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	47
Commission Reports and Studies of Schooling	
Selected Reactions to the Commission Reports and Studies of Schooling	
Summaries of Major Reports on Education	
ABOUT THE AUTHORS	50

Foreward

The decade of the 80s will undoubtedly be labelled as the decade of educational reform. The "back to the basics" theme, the move toward "accountability," and reports of declining test scores all prevalent in the previous decade; played a part in creating a readiness for the current push to reform education. The 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk*, became something of a catalyst. And however valid or invalid the assessments of the status of education in the United States may be, however naive or unrealistic many of the proposed solutions are, it seems clear that the public now expects, even demands, that changes be made.

To most educators, this would seem like good news. An apathetic citizenry had long been a worry to educators who were seeking to strengthen educational programs and found little support. But suddenly, it seemed, that those educators anxious to bring improvements about were put on the defensive, both to try to explain why the conditions were like they were reported to be and to react to well-intentioned but unsound proposals to improve education.

Educators whose primary focus is the middle school level have been especially hard pressed to be positive and effective in dealing with the rash of reports that were released during 1983-84. For many years, they had worked to overcome the void that existed in the understanding of the public about the period of early adolescence and the special educational needs of this group, then they found the middle level almost completely overlooked in the various reports, and finally, they faced the fact that most of the recommendations made in the reports were inappropriate when applied, as they often were, to the middle level.

Middle school educators, then, need all the help they can get— in gaining an overview of the major reports, in coming to grips with the implications of the reports for the middle level, in maintaining a proper perspective reflecting the nature of the age group, and in identifying ways to work effectively in instituting proper educational reform.

This publication seeks to meet those needs. It is current, realistic, and relevant. The National Middle School Association is grateful to John Swaim and Richard Needham for their leadership in developing this monograph. Thanks too to the several institute presenters who authored the chapters in Sections II and III. The information and viewpoints presented here should be familiar to every middle level educator in America. They need the perceptions of teachers, the characteristics of effective middle schools as recently revealed, the positive assessment of our schools, and the challenging, trenchant essay on power, politics, and leadership. This monograph deserves to be read, studied, and then used as a guide for pursuing the excellence everybody agrees on as a goal.

John H. Lounsbury

Introduction

On August 26, 1981, Secretary of Education Terrel Bell established the National Commission on Excellence in Education. His charge to the Commission was to develop a comprehensive report, within 18 months, which reflected the status of American education. On April 26, 1983, Dr. David Gardner, Chairman of the Commission, submitted the final report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, to Secretary Bell. The contents of this report not only captured the public's attention but seemed to evoke a barrage of other national, state and regional reports, each in turn producing their own supporters and critics.

Although we are seeing a tapering off of the establishment of new commissions to study educational issues on a state or national basis, we still have not felt the full impact of these studies. Although the intent of these national studies was to take a comprehensive look at American education and present solutions, the fact remains that implementation of most educational changes must occur at either the state or local levels. Most states have formed their own commissions or task forces, with some local districts following suit so the recommendations from both national and state studies are only beginning to surface in the political making arenas and in new policies.

The ball is now in the other court with the game becoming much more intense. The first volley (the national studies) made broad sweeping recommendations which drew equally wide sweeping comments and criticisms. However, for the most part, both the recommendations and the criticisms were just that and did not immediately change our educational system. These reports did stimulate some interesting and needed debate on issues facing American education. Now, at the state and local levels, specific actions are taking place.

This monograph is not just another general response or criticism of the various commission reports. The intent, rather, is to look at the recommendations and concerns raised by these reports and consider the possible ramifications for middle school education. It is critical that these recommendations for educational change be looked at specifically with respect to their impact on middle school education. It is hoped that this monograph will help clarify some of these implications and provide policy makers with information that would help them make decisions which are consistent with what has been established as sound educational practices for the pre- and early adolescent.

Although our intent is to provide information and opinions which would give a middle school perspective on the decision making process regarding educational change, we also recognize that the initial readers of this publication will probably be middle school educators rather than state legislators, school board members or superintendents. We, therefore, hope that the contents of this publication will reaffirm the beliefs of middle school readers so that they will do all they can to establish an appropriate educational environment for pre- and early adolescents and that they will interpret these reports to legislators. Any decision which would be contrary to the middle school concept should be viewed as suspect and probably educationally unsound. We hope this monograph will provide readers with evidence to question such decisions.

The idea for this monograph came after studying several of the commission reports and realizing that, with one exception, none of them really considered middle school education and, in fact, most dealt only with high school education. It was also clear that many of the recommendations which were being suggested for the secondary level could have far reaching and dangerous implications for the middle school. To address the effects of these reports in an open forum, we designed and planned a week-long institute during the summer of 1984 at the University of Northern Colorado. The institute was designed to familiarize the participants with the various commission studies and, in turn, consider these reports with respect to middle school education. We sought out speakers who were not only knowledgeable about middle school education but who had direct contact with one of the commission reports. We were fortunate to enlist people who were not only knowledgeable about middle schools but who had actively participated on two national commission studies and two state task forces. Two presenters were also active middle level teachers and able to provide an even more pragmatic viewpoint.

The major institute presenters were willing to provide the editors with manuscripts so that a publication dealing with this concern could also be prepared.

This monograph is organized into five sections. The first section gives the reader an overview of five of the many commission studies and related literature. Obviously not all the reports or all related literature could be presented so representative samples were selected, using these summaries as a reference point. Section II deals more specifically with the possible implications of these reports for middle level schools. This section is composed of the reflections of middle school educators who were involved with some one of the reports. Section III is composed of a strong and pointed statement regarding the role educators should play in creating educational reform. Section IV contains concluding remarks regarding the whole issue of middle level education and the prospect of educational change in our American system. The final section lists selected readings on the commission reports. The list includes not only seventeen of the national studies but also journal articles which give reactions, critiques, and summaries.

SECTION I.

An Overview Of Selected Studies of Education

One might search long and hard and still fail to locate a recent national report or study of American schools which dedicates any significant space or attention to the elementary or middle level. Unquestionably it is the secondary school which has recently been the focus of recent analysis and criticism. Yet, it is crucial that middle level and elementary education not dismiss the numerous proposed educational "reforms" contained in the seemingly unending reports which have been disseminated since April, 1983. A basic assumption underlying the need for middle school educators to direct their attention to these reports is the belief that the proposed reforms will soon "trickle down" to the other levels of schooling—an event which is already occurring.

With this assumption in mind, this section provides readers with a brief overview of five national reports which the authors consider to have the most potential impact on middle schools: *Action for Excellence*, *High School*, *A Nation at Risk*, *A Place Called School*, and the most recently published, *One Hundred Good Schools*.

The reports were selected based on one or more of the following criteria:

1. They addressed major issues common to most of the national studies;
2. They received high visibility in the media and had the most potential impact on middle school;
3. They were the most commonly referred to reports cited by the contributing authors in Section II.

Despite considerable media attention, few practitioners have had direct access to the reports/studies themselves. Like the general public, most professional educators have had to rely on the reactions contained in media reports. The brief summaries which follow are intended to familiarize the middle school educator with the sponsors/authors, composition of the commission of task force, data base utilized, time frame of the studies/reports, and a sampling of the conclusions and recommendations contained in the studies. In addition, recent sample initiatives at the state and local levels are briefly discussed. Readers are encouraged to review the reports themselves as well as more detailed summaries such as *A Summary of Major Reports on Education*, *Education Under Study*, *The Nation Responds*, and *Action in the States*. (See Bibliography.)

ACTION FOR EXCELLENCE: A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN TO IMPROVE OUR NATION'S SCHOOLS

Sponsored by the Educational Commission of the States, the report of the Task Force on Education for Economic Growth rests on the basic assumption that our nation's economic future and well-being rely heavily on the quality of American schools. The task force advocates new partnerships, especially between businesses and schools. Limited to eight general recommendations, *Action for Excellence* was not intended to serve as a comprehensive blueprint for educational reform; instead, as the title suggests, the task force members call for immediate actions to improve the nation's schools.

Author/Sponsor

Task Force on Education for Economic Growth,
Education Commission of the States

Chairs

Governor James Hunt, Jr., North Carolina (1983)
Governor Pierre S. du Pont IV, Delaware (1984)

Composition of Task Force

41 members: 13 governors, 3 state legislators,
14 business leaders, 1 labor leader,
6 educators, 4 organization leaders

Data Base

Task Force deliberations and commissioned papers

Focus

K-12

Time Frame of Study

Two years

Key Recommendations

1. Develop and put into effect state plans for improving education in public education K-12.
2. Create broader and more effective partnerships for improving education in states and communities.
3. Marshall the resources which are essential for improving public schools.
4. Express a new and higher regard for teachers.
5. Make the academic experience more intense and more productive.
6. Provide quality assurance in education.
7. Improve leadership and management in schools.
8. Serve better those students who are unserved or underserved.

Reactions

At first glance, one might be concerned with what may be considered to be the lack of representation of public school educators on the task force. The task force initially included one teacher, one principal, and six superintendents. Although *Action for Excellence* purports to focus on K-12 schooling, some of the recommendations such as consideration of a longer

school day and year may be in conflict with what is known about the characteristics of pre- and early adolescents. Despite these reservations, *Action for Excellence* has appeared to increase the interest and support of the business sector in the public schools, which it is hoped, will translate into meaningful actions.

HIGH SCHOOL

A REPORT ON SECONDARY EDUCATION IN AMERICA

Ernest Boyer, former United States Commissioner of Education and currently president of the Carnegie Foundation, authored this relatively comprehensive report on the nation's high schools. While acknowledging the critical roles of the elementary and middle levels of education, *High School* focuses almost exclusively on the public high school; few references are made to elementary schools, and middle level education is largely ignored.

Author/Sponsor

Ernest L. Boyer, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

Chair

Ernest L. Boyer

Composition of Task Force

28 members: including 9 post-secondary educators,
7 public school administrators (no teachers),
3 business leaders and representatives
of various organizations including the
National Education Association, American
Federation of Teachers, National School
Boards Association and National Parents
and Teachers Association

Data Base

Data from field studies of 15 public high schools; "A Study of Schooling" (John Goodlad) and *High School and Beyond* (James Coleman, National Opinion Research Center)

Focus

Public high school

Time Frame for Study

Three years

Key Recommendations

1. *Clarifying Goals*: every high school should establish clearly stated goals
2. *The Centrality of Language*: importance of written and oral use of language
3. *The Curriculum Has a Core*: recommendations regarding the nature of the core or required curriculum
4. *Transition to Work and Learning*: single track for all students leading to "elective clusters" in final two years
5. *Service-The New Carnegie Unit*: all students should complete a service unit involving volunteer work in the community

6. *Teachers-Renewing the Profession*: recommendations concerning improved working conditions, preservice, recruitment and education, and inservice education
7. *Instruction—A Time for Learning*: recommendations regarding pedagogy, textbooks and other instructional materials
8. *Technology—Extending the Teacher's Reach*: recommendations regarding the role of computers and other available technology
9. *Flexibility—Patterns to Fit Purpose*: flexibility in instructional time, school organization, gifted and talented and remedial programs
10. *Principal as Leader*: recommendations regarding the preparation and role of the principal
11. *Strengthening Connections*: recommendations focus on connection between the high school and post-secondary education and business and industry
12. *Excellence—The Public Commitment*: a call for increased support for public education from the public, state and federal government

Reactions

Although *High School* has little to say directly to middle level educators, this report deserves close scrutiny. Many of Boyer's conclusions and recommendations might be applied to the middle school. Unlike some of the other "excellence" reports, *High School* is based on an extensive data base.

A NATION AT RISK: THE IMPERATIVE FOR EDUCATIONAL REFORM

A Nation at Risk has unquestionably received the most attention and elicited the most responses of any of the studies or task force reports. Extremely pessimistic in its outlook, the report rests on the assumption that the "rising tide of mediocrity" in public schools is threatening to the very future existence of the United States. Many have characterized *A Nation at Risk* as proposing a number of "quick fixes" to complex problems in education. Regardless of the skepticism of educators, *A Nation at Risk* has caught the attention of the public, school officials and elected officials.

Authors/Sponsors

The National Commission on Excellence in Education, U. S. Department of Education

Chair

David P. Gardner, Chancellor, University of California

Composition of Task Force

18 members: members include a governor, legislators, representatives of higher education, state level school administrators, business and professional association leaders, and local school administrators

Data Base

Commissioned papers, public oral and written comment, panel discussions

Focus

K-12 public school (although the emphasis is clearly focused on the secondary school)

Recommendations

1. *Content*: graduation requirements strengthened to include five "new basics"—English, mathematics, science, social studies, computers
2. *Standards and Expectations*: schools, colleges must adopt more rigorous and measurable standards and higher expectations. Recommendations regarding grades, admissions requirements, standardized testing, textbooks and instructional materials
3. *Time*: Significantly more time devoted to learning the "new basics"; more effective use of existing school day; a longer school day or lengthened school year. More specific recommendations regarding homework, discipline and attendance
4. *Teaching*: recommendations regarding preservice preparation, rewards, professional development and career ladders
5. *Leadership and Fiscal Support*: Recommendations regarding the roles and responsibilities of the federal, state and local governments including leadership, fiscal support and planning

Reactions

A Nation at Risk, a 65 page document, appears to have become a "political football." The very tone of the report appeared to have been geared to elicit the attention of the media. If, indeed, that was the purpose, the report must be considered to have been successful.

While purporting to have a K-12 focus, several of the recommendations are in direct conflict with the philosophical bases of the middle school. The conclusions and recommendations of the task force are based primarily on task force deliberations and public testimony. Is this a data base upon which we wish to "reform" our schools? While many of the recommendations require the serious deliberations of educators, there is the real danger that some will view *A Nation at Risk* as a blueprint for restructuring public education.

A Nation at Risk contains numerous examples of statistical information which paint a disastrous portrait of America's schools. It is imperative that the reliability of these statistics be examined before the political and educational leaders accept the premise that America's schools are in a poor state of repair. In Section II, Conrad Toepfer and others effectively address this issue.

Regardless of the sense of frustration and defensiveness that *A Nation at Risk* has prompted among many educators, the fact remains that various clientele of the public schools have been left with a strong impression that our schools are doing a miserable job of educating our nation's youth. It is crucial that educators of all levels view the public attention generated by *A Nation at Risk* and other reports as an opportunity for progress. Posing a purely defensive posture is clearly not a prudent strategy.

A PLACE CALLED SCHOOL (A STUDY OF SCHOOLING)

Like *High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America*, *A Place Called School* is less likely to attract the attention of the media and general public than other smaller, slicker reports. Although *A Place Called School* is not a research report as such, most of John Goodlad's recommendations for school reform and educational reform are based on the data,

findings, and conclusions of the eight year "Study of Schooling." *A Place Called School* includes many recurring themes that have long been evident in Goodlad's work. The reader must take care to scrutinize Dr. Goodlad's recommendations. For example, Goodlad proposes restructuring the schools into ages 4-7 (primary), 8-11 (elementary), 12-15 (secondary) pattern. This proposed pattern has obvious implications for the organization and possibly the very existence of the middle school.

Despite the fact the middle school educator must find some cause for alarm in some of Goodlad's short and long range proposals for reform, both *A Place Called School* and "A Study of Schooling" have a wealth of data, and the recommendations provide professional educators with a starting point for reflection and meaningful educational reform.

Author/Sponsor

John Goodlad, 14 agencies and foundations

Chair

Ralph W. Tyler

Data Base

"A Study of Schooling": 38 schools and 1016 classrooms in seven states, questionnaires administered to 17,000 students, 1,350 teachers and 8,600 parents

Focus

K-12

Time Frame for Study

Eight years

Findings/Recommendations

The seemingly countless numbers of findings and recommendations contained in *A Place Called School* are organized around ten central themes.

1. School Functions
2. Relevance of School to the Lives of Students
3. How Teachers Teach
4. Circumstances Surrounding Teaching
5. The Curriculum
6. Distribution of Resources for Learning
7. Equity (of distribution of resources)
8. The Implicit or Hidden Curriculum
9. Satisfaction of Teachers, Students, Parents
10. The Need for Data

Space limitations preclude an in-depth discussion of Goodlad's findings, conclusions and recommendations. The recommendations contained in *A Place Called School* are organized into "Improving the Schools We Have" (short term) and "Beyond the Schools We Have" (long range). You are strongly encouraged to refer to the primary source for explanations of Goodlad's reasoning.

Short Term Reforms

1. States
 - a. clear articulation of goals

- b. availability of alternative curriculum designs and pedagogical procedures
- c. continuing assessment including assessment of legislative initiatives
- 2. School Districts
 - a. greater decentralization of authority and responsibility
 - b. stimulate long range planning at the individual school site
 - c. unit of improvement is each individual school
- 3. Teachers, Curriculum and Instruction
 - a. reorganization of teacher education to include early and more field experiences in demonstration schools
 - b. elimination of ability grouping and tracking
 - c. emphasis on mastery learning
 - d. closer articulation between elementary, middle and secondary schools

Long Range

Goodlad's long range recommendations are based on four conditions which he contends must be addressed before significant educational reform can be successful. These conditions reflect Goodlad's position that schools are complex social organizations which are greatly effected by the broader society in which they exist. The conditions are briefly summarized below.

1. The youth culture is "powerfully preoccupied with itself and is made up of individuals much less shaped by home, church and schools. There is a "poor fit" between our youth and the traditional school.
2. Schools have reacted "sluggishly" to the technology explosion.
3. Schools are preparing students for occupations which will soon be obsolete.
4. The need for educated citizens will continue into the future. Future parents, voters and workers will require a high degree "of awareness, insight, and problem solving ability that comes from education."

A Place Called School deserves the attention of educators at every level of schooling. It has much to say to the classroom teacher, principal and central office personnel. The findings of "A Study of Schooling," reported in this work, provide a springboard for local research and evaluation efforts and goal setting.

ONE HUNDRED GOOD SCHOOLS

The Good Schools Project is a good example of a study which was undertaken by a professional education organization in an effort to investigate those elements in our schools which make them successful. Unlike most of the national studies, *The Good Schools Project* focused on what its name implies—the positive aspects of schools across our nation. Also, unlike most of the national studies, *The Good Schools Project* dealt with all three levels of public education and not just the secondary level.

As stated in the preface of the report:

"For too long, Americans have been obsessed with the negative aspects of schools and schooling. This report presents information

from more than 28,000 students and 3,200 teachers who live and work in 106 good schools across America."

This report gives a refreshing look at American schools. Although not all of the positive aspects found in these schools could be generalized to our public schools at large, at least some could probably be found to one degree or another in all of our schools.

Author/Sponsor

Kappa Delta Pi

Chair

Jack R. Frymier

Composition of Task Force

The Good Schools Project committee was comprised of eight members, including the chairman.

Data Base

The data for this project were basically gathered through visitations to 106 elementary, middle school and high schools across the country. The interviews, questionnaires and other background information gathered from these schools were obtained by designated members of the local Kappa Delta Pi chapters.

Focus

The focus of *The Good Schools Project* was to "identify good schools throughout America; to study those schools carefully; to determine what made it possible for those schools to develop over time; and to make inferences that would be useful to people who want to make their own schools better."

Time Frame of Study

Appointment of Committee—September, 1981

Meeting of Committee—Spring, 1982

Data Collected Academic School Year—1982-83

Published—1984

Key Recommendations

After investigating 106 elementary, middle schools, and high schools which were identified by local educators as being "good schools," the following general observations were made.

1. Balance, breadth and richness of curricular offerings were seen.
2. Flexibility and variety were evident.
3. Goals were clear, expectations were high and achievement was valued.
4. Students and staff were committed and involved.
5. Individual differences were accepted and encouraged.
6. Students, teachers, administration and others involved in the school were dedicated, caring competent people.
7. Communication was open and positive among all the constituents of the school.
8. A reasonableness existed between expectations and standards.

Because this study included all three levels of education, some observations were made relative to the differences between the three levels.

1. Elementary teachers felt they were more effective in their classes; seem to have a higher morale, spirit of cooperation and sense of satisfaction; and had more contact with parents than evident at the middle school or high school levels. However, these same observations seemed to be likewise more evident at the middle school level than the high school level.
2. Teachers at all three levels felt equally the same about the importance of their respective curriculum goals, decision making, student achievement and use of textbooks as a primary instructional source.
3. The high school and middle school teachers indicated they spent more time after school with students than did elementary teachers, but they also indicated they had less control over students.
4. There were some differences found in the perceptions of students at the different levels with respect to what makes a good school; but all students seem to agree that good schools had fair rules, fair and consistent teachers, choice in subject matter and instruction which encouraged different points of view.

Reactions

The Good Schools Project is the only study done on a national basis which gives equal consideration to all three levels. It is also one of the few studies which approaches the assessment of American education from a positive, proactive viewpoint.

OVERVIEW OF STATE AND LOCAL REFORM INITIATIVES

While 1983 will be marked as the year of national task force reports, 1984 will likely be remembered as the year of state and local initiatives to renew the public schools. Legislation and state board programs and decisions are seemingly occurring daily. Some states undertook reform efforts prior to 1983, however, the actions certainly quickened following the dissemination of the commission task force reports. It is difficult to develop an accurate account or develop meaningful patterns of the reform initiative. The Education Commission of the States has identified more than 280 state task forces which have been established in response to the national task force report (Pipho, 1984). The recently disseminated report of the Task Force for Economic Growth, *Action in the States* (1984), suggests that 46 states have implemented or are developing comprehensive state plans to reform and renew the public schools.

Action at the local level is even more difficult to follow. It is clear, however, that a vast number of local systems have initiated reform and renewal efforts. Considering the diverse nature of the initiatives at the state level, it is reasonable to presume that the local level plans and actions are even more diverse.

In May of 1984, the United States Department of Education published *The Nation Responds: Recent Efforts to Improve Education*. This volume includes overviews of national developments, state and local efforts of educational reform. To our knowledge, information regarding local reform initiatives is quite limited and one is limited to media reports at present.

What is clear is action at all levels is rapid and diverse. There is danger inherent in rapid reforms, for actions taken must be accompanied by careful studies of the effects of these actions. Such studies must be sufficiently comprehensive to address issues more complex

than test scores. Unlike recent "reform" efforts such as the minimum competency movement in the late 1970's, the 1983-84 reforms are broad in scope. States and local school divisions are addressing diverse topics in considering reform efforts including graduation requirements, instructional materials and textbooks, teacher preparation and certification, teacher evaluation, teacher recognition and reward systems, the length of the school day and year, and discipline.

Middle schools will unquestionably be addressed in more detail at the state and local levels, therefore it is at those levels that middle school educators must take proactive postures. There are a great many professional educators and laypersons who do not understand the principles upon which the middle school is founded. While not appearing to be reactionary toward reform, the middle school educator must expand efforts to ensure that the middle school is not transformed back into a high school environment which ignores the unique needs and characteristics of the pre- and early adolescent. Failure to be proactive might undo the progress realized over the past decade.

REFERENCES

Education Commission of the States. (1984). *Action in the States: Progress Toward Educational Renewal*. Denver: July, p. 5.

Pipho, Chris. (1984). "Stateline, A Year of Transition for Education," *Phi Delta Kappan*, June, pp. 661-662.

United States Department of Education, (1984). *The Nation Responds: Recent Efforts to Improve Education*, Washington D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office.

SECTION II.

Reactions To The Studies And Their Effect On Middle Level Education

There have been countless responses to the various national educational studies during these last two years. The nature of most of these studies with respect to who wrote them, how the data were gathered, and their general findings and recommendations opened the door for a wide range of reactions. In this section some reactions to the reports will be presented. The authors are directly involved in middle level education. Their reactions, therefore, address issues and concerns raised by the national studies with respect to the potential impact on middle level education.

Conrad Toepfer opens with a much more positive view of American education than that contained in most of the national studies. However, he warns middle school educators that they must be ready and able to respond to these studies so that the gains which have been made in middle level education over the past decade will be maintained.

The second reaction, provided by junior high schools science teacher Bruce Brombacher, presents a mixture of a practitioner's perception and that of a member of one of the national commissions. As 1983 National Teacher of the Year, Bruce had the rare opportunity to be directly involved as a member of the National Education Commission of the States for Excellence in Education.

Craig Bowman, who is a junior high school English teacher, served on the Colorado Governor's Task Force on Excellence in Education. He gives another type of reaction in his presentation. Although less optimistic than Dr. Toepfer, he does express essentially the same concerns.

James Garvin, a strong advocate for middle school education, presents a viewpoint derived from being a middle school teacher educator and a member of the Secondary Schools Recognition Program sponsored by the National Commission on Excellence. Due to his involvement as a site visitor to exemplary middle schools, he is able to share some clear perceptions of what makes a good middle school.

ACCENT ON THE POSITIVE: WHAT IS REALLY EFFECTIVE IN TODAY'S EDUCATION?

C. F. Toepfer, Jr.

The chorus of a mid 1940's popular song began with the lyrics, "You've got to accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, latch onto the affirmative, don't mess with Mr. In-Between." It is important that educators keep that viewpoint in mind as we attempt to deal with the plethora of panels, commissions and reports criticizing American education at this time. We have a particular need to focus on the accomplishments of American public education if we are to maintain a separate and clear reference for understanding the distinct educational needs of children at each of their developmental stages. Our challenge is to communicate the differing educational needs among young children, emerging adolescents, and mature high school learners. This requires that educators and lay persons come to know the large body of fact which confirms the contemporary achievements of American education, in general, and of middle level education, in particular.

Middle level educators may feel like they are in the midst of the "War of the Reports." Since the appearance of *A NATION AT RISK* (Gardner) in April of 1983, report after report has continued to explode around us. We need to ask what good this bombardment of rhetoric shall do for education? We also must recognize that these reports call for response and action by educators. Principals, teachers, and lay persons must realize that the traditional "business-as-usual" will not prevail in our schools. Likewise, middle level school principals will have to become active spokespersons in their schools and communities to build public understanding of the true needs which must be addressed to maintain and improve middle level education. Failure to assume that obligation will result in professionals forfeiting any realistic opportunity to shape or influence the purposes and programs in middle level schools.

Some General Concerns

Before addressing the specific issues the national reports, commissions and panels pose to educators, some consideration of the current climate of criticisms of the nation's schools is in order. No responsible educational leader would deny that today's schools have problems and areas needing improvement. However, factual errors, misunderstandings, and omissions in these reports have diverted the public from seeing educational concerns truly needing improvement (Leonard). The public bestowed a "carte blanche" mantle of accuracy on these reports and often becomes suspicious when mere "educators" dispute those findings. However, at the local level, effective principals have an earned credibility which can turn attention to the real facts in their own school-community setting. They must become risk-takers and assume that responsibility if the local case for middle level education is to gain any recognition.

Even the best of these reports have not substantially sketched their recommendations with an image of, or vision for, the future. While acknowledging a role for computers in the future, the recommendations in these reports are clearly based upon the industrial society of our immediate past rather than for the information society which is already unfolding. To be valid, it would seem that critiques of today's schools should clearly frame their recommendations within a projection of the demands which life and the world may make of today's students some twenty years from now. Yet, these critiques fail almost universally in this dimension. *A PLACE CALLED SCHOOL* (Goodlad) is somewhat of an exception. These re-

ports, commissions and panels seem to hold an almost naive sort of faith that education will be able to make the society succeed again in a kind of 1950's milieu. In recommending increasing the quantity of factual information in content areas, lengthening the school day and year as primary solutions, these reports have completely overlooked the need to consider qualitative changes in the school experience before examining the more simplistic question of "how much of what kind of learning is required to get where?" Remember, children who begin kindergarten in fall of this Orwellian year of 1984 will graduate from high school in 1997 and from college in the year 2001. Can we be so myopic as to believe that the mere increasing of the mass quantities of today's subject matter is the primary recommendation to make education more adequate for the future needs of today's students? Today, we cannot clearly predict what skills and knowledge base will be required for both academic pursuits and the world of work ten years from now. It is unfortunate that people readily accept the recommendations of these reports without considering what the future shall demand of today's students.

The Knowledge Explosion Reality

We know that today, the data base of every technology-related area is changing and doubling every five years. This is predicted to increase to a doubling every two years by the year 1995. For example, graduating engineers at a major university were recently told at commencement, "the skills and information you have learned in your undergraduate program will be functional for about four years. What you will need to know as engineers then, will largely be discovered between now and then." Parents, lay persons, and educators may be better able to understand this issue from the following examples. High school students studying the Periodic Chart in Chemistry in 1954 studied virtually the same Chart that students did thirty years before that. Now, compare the significant changes in today's Periodic Chart from the one students studied only ten years ago and the issue is easy to see. As another example, high school students taking tenth grade Biology in 1977 found the facts of Biology in the sophomore college programs in 1981 had substantially changed in that four year interval. Both the public and educators must understand that changes in data bases will continue to accelerate. In times past, educated persons prided themselves on what they had memorized and "learned." In the future, information and facts in mathematical, scientific and technological areas will be increasingly learned as short-term memory and recall. The growing shorter life of such facts will make this necessary. Indeed, computers can call up that data and the educated person will use her/his thinking skills and processes to deal with those temporary data-bases. While those data-bases change, the effectiveness of one's education shall be in her/his abilities to think about and process that information. The reports have largely overlooked this issue in their infatuation with the "learn-more-of-the-same" syndrome.

Is it really to our advantage when "Back-to-the-Basics" advocates take pride, as they do, in the two states considering laws which would ban the use of hand-held calculators in school? It is a fact that engineers no longer solve logarithms with slide rules. They use hand-held calculators. As a matter of fact, if you have a slide rule, keep it as an antique because they are no longer manufactured! But . . . in those two states, the prohibition of hand-held calculators in schools might put the slide rule industry back into business again. What kind of progress is that?

Illusions of Elitism

American educators and lay persons need to examine the data-bases upon which each of the national reports makes its generalizations and conclusions. Charges of the general failure of American secondary education are poorly founded. Our nation educates the children of all its people at public expense to a greater degree than any other nation in the world. While 85% of Americans graduate from secondary school, nations such as the United Kingdom, West Germany, Italy, and France graduate between 15 and 20% of their students from secondary school. Do we want to move to such a selective model? And by what means do we determine success? The United States has a 98.2% literacy rate, highest among the western, developed nations (Fowler). In literature and science, American youngsters scored higher on particular tests than students from Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom in areas of mathematics, science, literature and reading. Reading scores of American 14-year-olds show them to be ahead in every instance of youngsters from those nations on specific, comparative tests. In the 22nd International Mathematics Olympiad held in 1981, the eight student American team finished first among the competing teams from 27 nations. Why don't the national panels, commissions and reports tell the public about such achievements of America's schools? Examination of the Nobel Prizes Laureates in the past decade shows the United States has more winners than all of the nations of all the world combined. In addition, 28 of the last 29 American Nobel Prize winners were graduates of the public schools of our nation. Also, 23 of the 25 American astronauts are public school graduates. Another interesting statistic shows that a significant majority of Harvard University's entering freshmen come from exclusive private secondary schools. However, Harvard students who graduated from public high school fare much better among those who are elected to Phi Beta Kappa in their junior and senior years.

To quote a line from the popular commercial, "Where's the beef?" Where are the real "beefs" about the effectiveness of American public schools? Yet, facts on the success of education, such as those just cited, are not in the minds of the American public. Politically, *A NATION AT RISK* (Gardner) was spread by every local evening news television program last April and then followed by similar sensationalized commentary by each of the major network news programs. The media did not entertain the possibility that the data base of *A NATION AT RISK* (Gardner) could be less than infallible. Thus, the public now assumes these reports to be completely accurate. As a result, educators who question these indictments of American schools are, more often than not, viewed as trying to "whitewash" the poor job our schools are supposedly doing. Principals must realize their obligation to work carefully and correct this misunderstanding at the local level. In recent years, the Phi Delta Kappa Annual Gallup Poll on Education has reflected an increase in public disenchantment with the nation's schools. However, those respondents almost unanimously indicated that their child's school and local school district were not among the "bad" schools they felt exist in the nation. This gives the local principal a "turf" to establish credibility for the effectiveness of the local middle level school program. This route needs to be taken because educators have not, as yet, made an impact upon opinions about our schools at state or national levels. That more remote audience would seemingly best be reached by building such local support bases.

A Question of Money

Unfortunately, the general public accepts the ridiculous notion that this nation can improve the educational effectiveness of its schools without increasing expenditures. While the current national administration tells us we need more money to improve defense we are to accept that we can improve education by cutting school budgets. Yet, the facts show why the effectiveness of American public education is truly the envy of the modern world. Basically, our nation attempts to educate all of the children of all the people at public expense. As was stated earlier, we send approximately 85% of our youth on to high school and graduate most. Nations such as Belgium, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and West Germany keep between 15 and 20% of their youngsters in school in the middle level and high school years. Despite that they spend a significantly larger portion of their Gross National Product on public education with considerably higher per pupil expenditures than does the United States. In fact, the United States spends less of its Gross National Product on the public education of its children than any other developed, western nation in the world! The United States spends only 3% of its Gross National Product on its public education system. The least amount spent by any of the other previously cited nations is 12%! France, for instance, spends 16% of its Gross National Product on its public education system.

Consider this. We are spending only 3% of our Gross National Product on public education of approximately 85% of our youths continue through high school. Meanwhile, France, spends 16% of its Gross National Product on public education (more than five times of its Gross National Product than America spends) but educates only the brightest of France's youth who stay in school. The same is true in the case of every other developed, western nation. Keep this fact in mind also. At the beginning of its report, *A NATION AT RISK* (Gardner) cites the poor performance of United States post-elementary students on comparative tests with students from other nations as a major failure of American Schools. However, on page 34, *A NATION AT RISK* (Gardner) casually admits that the top 9% of American post-elementary schools compare favorably with the top 9% of students from these western, developed nations!

To emulate the expenditure of these other nations, we would have to increase our national expenditure on public education by a factor of five. Even then, we would be spreading out that money to educate virtually all our children through high school. These other nations, however, use their secondary education monies for less than one-fourth of their most able students continuing beyond the elementary level. They can afford this because the United States spends over 52% of its federal budget on defense-related expenditures. Our nation, in effect, finances defense for these nations and much of the free world. This allows other western, developed nations to spend more of their resources on education and other internal needs. As a result, these other nations spend between only 5 and 12% of their national budgets on defense. Despite this disparity in financial support, the fact remains that the top 9% of post-elementary school students from the United States still out-perform their counterparts from the other developed, western nations (Tanner).

Another unnoticed mark of the success of our nation's teachers is that in the other developed western nations mentioned, teachers work with far fewer students each day than do American teachers. Teachers of Mathematics, Science, or Social Studies in those countries teach no more than 75 students per school day in their 7-12 programs which contain the top

25%, or less, of students still in school. Yet, American middle level and high school teachers routinely deal with somewhere between 120 and 150 students from across the complete ability and achievement spectrum each school day. Think how well American teachers could do if they had only to deal with 75 individual students each day! While it will cost more to improve our nation's schools, let us not overlook the magnificence of the achievement of the American mass public educational system. Clearly, no nation in the world has come close to the accomplishments, and yet, we are made to believe that poor education is endangering the American destiny. Unless these facts are brought to the American consciousness, we stand in increasing danger. As will be discussed later, efforts are under way to make sweeping changes in the regulations of schooling in our individual states under the assumption that our schools are highly ineffective. Such efforts seem bent upon overturning the American system of schooling which has resulted in the accomplishments cited here.

The Plight of Middle Level Education

It is clear that most of these reports view secondary education in general, and the high school in particular, as the villain and culprit in American education. It would seem that elementary education, quite miraculously, has escaped the wrath of the reports. While they are not specifically singled out for the most part, junior high, middle, and intermediate schools are being counted as "guilty by association" with the high school in the broad context of the secondary education. This is in large measure due to the fact that, at the local district level, parents and lay persons do not understand that because middle level youngsters are unique, their education must also differ from both the elementary and high school. We must communicate that difference if we expect parents and lay persons to come to our support. The inaccuracies and simplistic solutions recommended in many of these reports cannot be readily understood if one believes both middle level and high school students can learn in the same kind of school. It is important, therefore, that middle level principals begin immediately to bring information to their communities which will establish an understanding of the uniqueness of middle level educational needs.

Persons with even a basic knowledge of the differences in middle level education needs from those at both early childhood and high school can readily see the dilemmas the national reports, panels and commissions are creating. However, the developers of these reports are virtually unaware of the unique characteristics of middle level education. Therefore, they have lumped-in the middle level with the high school in their vision of needed reform of secondary education. Literally, they are not aware of the differences or developmental needs. Secondly, legislatures in the states of our nation are attempting to change educational requirements by state law in the belief that the criticisms of these reports are universally accurate. The facts about the success of America's schools are not known to these legislators. Our profession is beginning to respond to these inaccuracies (Howe). However, public knowledge of these kinds of statements may not come in time to stop the groundswell of uninformed changes in state educational laws of the nation.

Consider the following changes which have already taken place in various state legislatures to date in 1984. Several states have now made it possible for middle course credits to earn high school graduation credit either as electives or regular courses. New York State has abolished traditional Home Economics and Industrial Arts exploratory courses in grades 6, 7 and 8 in favor of new Technology Career courses which offer virtually no hands-on learning activities. The learning styles of young adolescents require learning activities beyond

mere sedentary, intellectual activities. None of the national reports, panels or commissions indicate there is anything ineffective with traditional middle level exploratory, practical-arts courses. Indeed, there is long standing evidence that the hands-on activities in middle grades Industrial Arts and Home Economics programs have helped youngsters consolidate the facts, skills and information they have cognitively learned in mathematics and science classes. However, New York State has largely eliminated hands-on activities in the Technologies Careers courses which, this fall, will begin to replace traditional Industrial Arts and Home Economics courses in the middle grades.

New York State has also mandated that students who have not completed two units (years) of foreign language by the end of ninth grade cannot continue in Regents College Preparatory diploma programs until that foreign language requirement is met. Other situations are requiring that middle level school EMR learners must sit through the same high ability courses as more able youngsters. The only difference is that the EMR students will not have to take the proficiency examinations given to the average and higher level students. This will place substantial numbers of learners in classes dealing with materials and levels of learning which they cannot comprehend. In another situation, 9th and 10th grade courses can now be taken for credit in the 7th and 8th grades. Remember, these provisions have already been enacted into law in some states!

The following proposals are being seriously deliberated in state legislature at this time. In one state, proposed legislation would require youngsters to make a firm and irrevocable choice in 6th grade as to whether they would pursue an academic or vocational track in their grade 7-12 education. In another, students who do not demonstrate proficiency in a second language by the end of grade nine could not go ahead in school until such proficiency is demonstrated. In another, students who do well in seventh grade would be encouraged to move directly ahead to ninth grade. These proposals are being deliberated by legislators who do not understand that the middle level student is not an "early edition" of the high school student. The litany of increasing problems of suicide and suicide attempt among middle level students is increasing faster than in any other age group of Americans today. USA TODAY (17 & 18) continues to report new information on this tragic situation. The problems of emotional illness and stress problems in this age group (Elkind) indicates adult decisions are causing these increases in emotional traumas by literally robbing children of their childhood before they are ready to understand more mature challenges and life experiences.

On January 28, 1984, more than 80,000 7th and 8th graders, all of them under age 13, took the SAT test as part of a major talent search to find very bright youngsters and propel them ahead. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics opposed this as did the president of Educational Testing Services, the company that produces and administers the SAT test. Said ETS president Dr. Gregory Anrig, "as a person who once was a junior high school teacher and principal, I think we have to remember that we are dealing with 12-year old youngsters. What are we putting them through? Is it worth it?" Yet, the tests were given and our public and legislators applaud this kind of action.

Significant Middle Level Educational Gains

There have been gains in achievement at the middle level which the national commissions have failed to report. The following data from the National Center for the Assessment of Education are reported by its Director, Archie LaPointe.

There was a one percent (significance occurs at the .05 level) increase in mean percent correct answers on reading achievement tests among 13-year-olds between 1974-75 and 1979-80. Between 1977-78 and 1981-82, 13-year-olds increased almost four percent in mean percent correct answers on mathematics achievement tests. On the mathematics achievement tests given during those years, low achieving 13-year-old students demonstrated a 5.5 percent gain in mean percent correct answers while high achieving 13-year-olds demonstrated an almost two percent increase in mean percent correct answers.

A major international study of science achievement, just completed, validates another area of significant middle level educational gains. The results of the Second International Science Study (Doran) have just been announced. This study compared American students with those from other nations in a follow-up to the First International Science Study completed in 1970. Professors Rodney L. Doran of State University of New York at Buffalo and Willard J. Jacobsen of Columbia University coordinated the American portion of the study. American ninth grade students grew 5.2 percent in overall science achievement over students tested in the First National Science Study. These ninth graders know more about biology and physical science than their counterparts did ten years ago.

While *A NATION AT RISK* (Gardner) advocates heavier doses in science, Professor Doran indicated "that conclusion was based on testing conducted on American children ten years ago." American students participating in the Second International Science Study did much better on process questions which required them to classify, calculate, and analyze data rather than merely recall memorized facts. Jennings reports Doran's observation: "the preliminary results of our study indicate that there has been some long-term, positive impact of the process approach to learning science begun in the mid and late 1960's." This strongly contradicts the opinion of many national commissions, panels, and reports that educational innovations in the 1960's resulted in poorer student achievement.

While there are both accomplishments and areas needing improvement in middle level education, American educational and lay populations need to focus on some of these accomplishments of middle level education. Both these studies document the gains in intellectual achievement realized for middle level students in the past decade. Facts such as these are important in examining the case for middle level schools as we deal with the recommendations which many states are now making to bring the high school academic courses down into the middle level.

The College Preparation Issue

What clearly is at issue is the attempt to make middle level education part of the college-preparatory cycle. Responsible middle level education leaders from the days of early junior high school have worked steadfastly to keep inappropriate, high school emphases out of middle level schools. We need to recall the words of James M. Glass (16) Sixty years ago he observed that "there can be only one college preparatory unit in the public school system. This has been the senior high school and this school must continue to be the sole agency responsible for accrediting pupils to the higher institutions." (p. 15) However, today legislators are pursuing that change in many states, despite the data which substantiates this is contrary to the educational interests of early adolescents in middle level schools.

At the same time the reality of college preparation needs must be carefully studied and projected in every state of the nation. The national panels, commissions, and reports all con-

cur that technological preparation and college education is a desirable goal for more and more American students. However, the emphasis which these reports attach to technological education for employability has nothing more than a speculative base. The previously cited "Symposium on the Year of the Reports" (Howe, et al.) carefully refutes the unsubstantiated allegations the national reports make on the technology education issue. In studying the reality of more education or employability, Duckworth reports:

"The Bureau of Labor Standards, moreover, presents quite a different picture of the demands for highly educated young people in the next ten years." (She cites the October 18th issue of the NEW YORK TIMES, page 1 for the following figures.) By 1990 the four fastest-growing high technology jobs together will create a total of 382,000 new jobs. The number of fast-food workers alone will increase by 400,000 and seven other kinds of work are above them on the list. (Secretaries top the list at 700,000; nurses' aides/orderlies are next at 508,000, followed by janitors, sales clerks, and cashiers.)

In support of Duckworth's argument, the May 27, 1984 issue of THE MIAMI HERALD reports that students are not electing to pursue the skill development center programs in Florida's effort to prepare increased numbers of students for high-tech, post-secondary education. Students cite boredom, hard work which does not relate to their interests, and better employment opportunities in non-high-tech areas as major reasons for not selecting the skill center programs. As a result, some Florida State Education Department officials has commented that no further changes in the state's programs should be made until there is time to judge the effectiveness of changes already made since A NATION AT RISK (Gardner) appeared.

Let us remember the reason why exploration has been a major function of middle level education. Emerging adolescents between 10 and 14 years of age need to clarify who they are and what they would like to become. To decrease this function in the name of making the middle level school an integral part of the college preparatory system would be counter productive to their educational needs. How many youngsters at this age know what specialized preparation for post secondary school they want and are able to pursue? Duckworth's data and the Florida problem suggest that perhaps even the high schools need to re-think the readiness of adolescents to make such decisions. Middle level educators must live up to their obligation of protective custody and maintain what we know to be the essential personal, social, emotional and intellectual tasks for emerging adolescent youngsters.

How Safe is Elementary Education?

The national reports suggest relatively little for early childhood education. Perhaps conventional wisdom has established a national understanding of the educational needs of the young children beyond what has been achieved at either middle level or high school levels. It may be that elementary school self-contained classrooms where teachers know a single class of students across most of the school day have been fundamental in this accomplishment. The structure of post-elementary schooling where teachers deal routinely with from 100 to 500 students daily may also impose a lack of understanding of the real educational achievements at those levels. However, educators and lay persons need to keep abreast of efforts in many states to begin serious intellectual activities earlier in elementary schools.

It is important that we insist on hard data to prove that such efforts are neither futile, abortive, nor harmful to young children. Existing data (Elkind) show the dangers of accelerating the development of children beyond their readiness of mind and psyche. New York State Ed-

ucation Commissioner Gordon Ambach commented on the nationally syndicated Phil Donahue Television Show that children could begin to read, write, and cipher at four years of age. This writer developed a position paper documenting the research on the reality of such an approach for more than precocious learners (16). While that publication was sent to Commissioner Ambach, the Board of Regents and every Bureau Chief in the New York State Education Department, no one of the recipients ever even acknowledged receipt of that publication. However, the April, 1984 New York State Curriculum Mandates now allows for future specification of means to accelerate learning demands in the elementary grades! Every educator has the obligation to make the dangers of such efforts known to their local parent and lay constituencies in their state.

Is It "Your" Business?

Efforts to stem this rising tide require the enlistment of all who know better and those who will listen to us. The late Walt Kelly once observed in his cartoon strip, POGO, "We have met the enemy, and they is us." That finger points at anyone who reads this. Will educators take the time, effort, and the risk to speak out in favor of what is known to be in the best educational and developmental interests of middle level youngsters? If you do not join us, who will? At this time, we, the caretakers, have a major stake of the fate of the American educational system in our hands. Are we willing to try and influence public opinion in the areas discussed here? Can we stem and reverse the legislative tide which has been de-regulating middle level education across our nation since September, 1983? Do we want to try? Our nation was the first to recognize the need for a separate unit of schooling for middle level youngsters. Our hesitation or failure to enter fully into these efforts may make us witness to the end of the almost century-long effort to establish programs specifically responsive to youngsters between childhood and adolescence.

And what of our obligation to uphold our state education laws and mandates? There is no comfortable or pleasant reply. With the recommendations of the national reports in general, and at the middle level in particular, we face a moral challenge which has never before so strongly confronted American educators. Do we retain any professional integrity if we enforce educational regulations which we know are contrary to the needs of youth? If we do, we are no better than Adolf Eichmann whose sole defense in his trial as one of the masterminds of the Holocaust was: "I was only following orders." There is still time in some states to work for the defeat of regulations which would put middle level educators in that terrible dilemma.

Bringing these facts to the attention of educators, parents, legislators, and lay persons in general requires the highest priority. It is absolutely essential that we develop a clear understanding of the facts documenting the progress being made in middle level schools and programs which respond to the unique educational needs of middle level youngsters. With such an understanding, middle level education can continue to refine the effectiveness it has already achieved. Without it, a regression to an education system which responds to only elementary or high school student needs becomes all the more probable. Remember, for those who reside in states like mine, we now face the choice of the moral obligation to dissent and disobey state educational regulations while working for their repeal, or, to enforce educational experiences we know will prove detrimental to youth. At what level will you choose to deal with this issue?????

REFERENCES

- 1) Doran, R. PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF THE USA PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND IEA SCIENCE STUDY. Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. New York, May 27, 1984. Available from R. Doran, Department of Learning and Instruction, 593 Christopher Baldy Hall, State University of New York at Buffalo, Amherst, NY 14260.
- 2) Duckworth, E. What Teachers Know: The Best Knowledge Base. (pp. 1, 16-20) In H. Howe II, Symposium on the Year of the Reports: Response from the Educational Community. HARVARD EDUCATIONAL REVIEW, February, 1984, pp. 1-31.
- 3) Elkind, D. THE HURRIED CHILD. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, Co., 1981.
- 4) Fowler, C. Only a Masochist Could Accept the Findings of the Excellence Commission. AMERICAN SCHOOL BOARD JOURNAL, September, 1983, pp. 43, 46, 49.
- 5) Gardner, D., Chairman, A NATION AT RISK: THE IMPERATIVE FOR EDUCATIONAL REFORM. Washington, DC: U.S. Office of Education, 1983.
- 6) Glass, J. CURRICULUM PRACTICES IN THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL AND GRADES FIVE AND SIX. Supplementary Studies No. 25. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1924, p. 15.
- 7) Goodland, J. A PLACE CALLED SCHOOL: PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983.
- 8) Howe, H. II, et. al. Symposium on the Year of the Reports: Responses from the Educational Community. HARVARD EDUCATIONAL REVIEW, February, 1984, pp. 1-31.
- 9) Hunt, J. ACTION FOR EXCELLENCE: A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN TO IMPROVE OUR NATION'S SCHOOLS. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States, 1983.
- 10) Jennings, I. University of Buffalo Researcher Finds Science on the Upswing in the United States Schools. THE BUFFALO NEWS, June 18, 1984, p. B-1.
- 11) LaPoint, A. The Good News about American Education. PHI DELTA KAPPA. June, 1984, pp. 663-668.
- 12) Leonard, G. The Great School Reform Hoax: What's Really Needed to Improve Public Education? ESQUIRE. April, 1984. 47-55.
- 13) NEW YORK STATE BOARD OF REGENTS ACTION PLAN TO IMPROVE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION RESULTS IN NEW YORK STATE. Albany, NY: The State Department of Education, April, 1984.
- 14) Tanner, D. The American High School at the Crossroads. EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP, March, 1984, pp. 4-13.
- 15) THE MIAMI HERALD, May 27, 1984, p. B-2.
- 16) Toepfer, C. Can Learners Actually Begin and Leave Schooling Earlier? A Look at Reality and Research. THE WESTERN NEW YORK ASSOCIATION FOR SUPERVISION AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT NEWS LETTER, Vo. IV, No. 5, July, 1983, pp. 1-9. Available from WNYASCD, 524 Christopher Baldy Hall, State University of New York at Buffalo, Amherst, NY 14260.
- 17) USA TODAY, February 27, 1984, p. 10-A.
- 18) USA TODAY, June 6, 1984, p. 6-D.

BEYOND THE RHETORIC: ACTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PRACTITIONER

Bruce Brombacher

It is time to step forward and take action! Clearly that is the message of the national reports that have been released. But it has been difficult to find a copy of each report and reading each one and studying the sweeping recommendations has been impossible. Thus, where do we start?

The reports helped to focus attention on education and started a national debate on educational issues for the 1980's and beyond. Recommendations included devising state plans of action to improve schools, establishing partnerships with business and industry, investing more financial resources in schools, making the school experience more productive, improving school leadership and management, providing equal opportunity for students to participate in school, and assuring quality and excellence in education. In making these recommendations, the reports have generated a groundswell of public support for our schools.

Much of the testimony and many of the issues studied by the national commissions and task forces have been around for 20 to 100 years. It was a major task for each panel to condense thousands of recommendations in a "top ten" list and then present a report to the public, a report that would be short, concise, clear, and exciting. As a result, the dramatic oversimplification of the issues that helped stir the interest of the public is now threatening to damage the educational process.

The "excellence" bandwagon is running full speed ahead with decision makers at all levels proposing quick-fix solutions to complex problems. It is similar to the early space race days. We perceived a threat to our nation and mobilized our forces in science and mathematics. Yet, it did not take long for our society to again become complacent about our schools.

Now we are following the same course of action. Many states and communities reacted to the reports by designing action plans to help improve education in their own region. These plans call for tougher academic standards, improved teacher training, more productive use of instructional time, increased funding to support schools, back-to-basics, and improved teacher pay. Many of the recommendations are being implemented with little or no study as to how the proposed changes would affect the students.

It seems that we **SHOULD** have learned our lesson. Public support and action to maintain and to improve quality of the schools will not survive if it is a temporary desire to compete with foreign nations or just a feeling that it is time for a change. The real support for education must be based upon the assumption that our youth are the most precious resource in America. Our future is in their hands. Each citizen must assume responsibility for the quality of our schools by becoming personally involved.

If we are serious about education renewal, we must move from dialogue to action and we must take that action to the local level. Citizens must be made aware that they have a personal stake in the success or failure of this effort. Business, government, labor and education leaders have both the obligation and the opportunity to make this happen. The present discussions about improving education provide an opportunity for communities and states to make

a renewed commitment to place education as the #1 priority in the nation. Maintaining and improving the quality of life requires that each person come to "own" the responsibility for making it happen.

The major reports were designed to stimulate critical thinking about conditions in a local area so that creative solutions could be implemented to deal with specific problems. Many of the phrases, labels and "buzz words" used to spark public interest at the national or state level are being used in local districts to promote educational excellence. Unfortunately, many of the proposed solutions are only appropriate for specific levels and areas.

We must see beyond the labels and QUICK-FIX-fix solutions. We need to provide opportunities for each child to grow and to reach his or her own potential. It will require a collaborative effort of people from all walks of life. There is a wealth of research to draw upon in making decisions about improving education, but none of it can be simply quantified and labeled in one neat package for everyone.

The national reports have caused us to take a closer look at our schools and communities. We have found that dedicated teachers, enthusiastic parents, and creative students are working closely with community groups as they struggle to provide meaningful learning experiences for children of all backgrounds and abilities. We must continue to support their efforts to achieve academic excellence.

At the risk of oversimplifying the issues; what should be included in the educational reforms for the 1980's and beyond? We must focus on the quality of the instructional experience. Teachers and principals are the central instructional force in the school building. Together with the community—parents, business, industry, labor, senior citizens, boards, administrators and elected officials—we need to provide opportunities for our young people to explore, to be creative, and to be successful at tasks that suit their own individual talents. As we begin to meet their special and unique needs, the kids will see that we love them and that we care about what they accomplish. Also, we must improve the opportunities and rewards for teachers as they ignite the sparks of excitement and bring forth the rush of enthusiasm from the children.

First, in our classrooms, we must try to extend an invitation to learn to each student we meet. There is no magic recipe for good teaching. Several books and publications describe statistically significant attributes or "top ten" lists of qualities for outstanding teachers. But the best descriptions are those from students, parents and other educators. In essence they describe a good teacher as someone who loves and cares about each child.

We are dedicated to helping students find a direction and a purpose in their lives. We must provide an environment and an atmosphere for young people that is caring, loving, and nurturing. At the same time, we must provide a structure that challenges them and requires them to do their best. We are providing opportunities for kids to establish roots for support and growth and wings to explore.

In our classrooms we try to make life special for each student. The children are involved in the learning process from beginning to end. Together we consider topics, methods, materials, resources, timelines and modes of evaluation. The kids are involved in the decision making process and take ownership for their learning. Thus, interest levels remain high while motivation and discipline tend to improve. The key to success is active involvement.

In the second place, we need more than just the student-teacher partnership. We need a total collaborative effort from the community. As we look at the critical issues in education

and try to provide meaningful experience for kids, it is clear that we need to utilize all the resources available in our local communities. Our changing demographics and the effects of technology will force us to provide opportunities for student to experience the social interactions within the community family.

When we actively involve people from the community in the process of education and they feel some ownership for what is happening with young people, the community is more inclined to eagerly support the schools. At this point, then, learning becomes for kids, not just an isolated experience in the classroom, but a truly meaningful lesson in which they learn to be productive and informed citizens in the total community family.

A third concern is the role the emerging technology will play in our schools. We must not let business and industry determine the function of technology in the classroom. We educators must take the responsibility for finding ways that the technology can be used to improve the instructional process. The ideal situation would be to study what functions that need to be performed in our schools, then determine which ones could be handled more effectively or enhanced using the technology. Finally, the equipment and software that are appropriate for each specific job could be purchased.

We must look beyond the role of the computer and other devices as simply objects of instruction or as tools to transmit knowledge. We need to strive to use the new technologies to provide alternatives and open-ended experiences which help youngsters assume an active role in their own learning. After the first steps of familiarization, we must encourage children to take the next step, apply the technology. Just as the microcomputer brain of a robot can be reprogrammed for different jobs, so too must we be able to adapt to the new and changing technology.

As we strive to improve the quality of the instructional experience we face another challenge. We must define an appropriate curriculum for the future. Indeed, the issue is not to require more and harder, but to be better!

We are trying to narrow the performance gap between the skills kids acquire in school and the skills that are needed in life. As the debate continues, there seems to be a consensus among those from business, industry, universities, communities and public schools that we should broadly educate rather than narrowly train. "Learning how to learn" has been, is now, and will continue to be the most valuable basic skill we can acquire. That requires a strong foundation in reading, writing and computing as we teach conceptualizing, analyzing, reasoning, problem solving and decision making.

The curriculum must reflect the dynamics of our society. We need to assist students in learning to adapt to change. Education itself must become a life-long, dynamic experience as we each play an active role in our own learning.

Reviewing the recommendations, they seem too general and oversimplified, just like the results of the national studies! The meaningful reform in education will happen as these issues are translated into specific actions at the local level. Improving the quality of education will depend on each person making a commitment to provide the best opportunities for our young people to see that they are free to grow and to be what they dream.

EDUCATIONAL IMPROVEMENT: A VIEW FROM THE TRENCHES

Craig Martin Bowman

During the last two years, we have endured a myriad of educational reports—each more dire than the last it seems. Our schools, they claim, are mediocre, our standards deplorable, and our educational standing with other industrial nations woeful. Our grading standards are laughable, our teacher training programs unrealistic, and our graduates illiterate.

I have read these "damage reports" and even helped write one of them for Governor Richard D. Lamm's Task Force on Excellence in Education. Like it or not, those reports are accurate. Indeed, if any fault can be ascribed to them, it is simply this: they diagnosed only half the real malaise—ten years too late.

A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform was published in April, 1983. Our educational problems, however, existed long before that. During the liberal onslaught of the 60's and 70's, many of us educators tried to warn our colleagues that the educational community—particularly, the impoverished minorities—would not long abide our shoddy standards, enforced in the naive attempt to be "meaningful and relevant."

Our teachers would soon tire of "watered down" academic standards. In fact, in one of the schools where I taught an unwritten rule assigned grades by political pressure. The principal discouraged classical literature because writers like Shakespeare or Chaucer were "beyond most students' interest areas and irrelevant to their frame of reference." And, at that time, he could get away with that kind of lie. For, in deference to his status and education background few dared to question the veracity of his statements—until our first graduating class suffered a college dropout rate approaching the unbelievable.

Parents would no longer tolerate poor disciplinary standards. When the trash in the school was measured in feet, few were willing to face the problem. Those who did were labeled as negative. Fights—some with knives and brass knuckles—were so commonplace as to receive little attention after the first year. Some schools required metal detectors and security police. The number and seriousness of assaults on teachers and school personnel increased steadily, while few of the victims were compensated in any way and even fewer young criminals were apprehended, tried, convicted or sentenced. "He's just a child," seemed sufficient excuse for adult avoidance of serious adolescent problems.

No one—not parents, teachers or students—will continue to swallow demands for more and more money for less and less education. In one district, less than a year ago, teachers and parents asked their fellow citizens to approve a mill levy increase which would "save the quality of our schools." Recently in this same district, it was announced that the superintendent would receive a generous raise—his second in as many years—while he and the board cut music and art programs and express uncertainty about a 6% raise for teachers.

Public education's customers, who now pay about 85% of their taxes for schools, are not satisfied with the present return on their educational dollar. The reports are only the tip of the iceberg. When single, black mothers cheat on welfare so they can send their children to private schools, I dare say, we have a serious problem with customer dissatisfaction. When hispanic parents begin training their toddlers in various sports in the hope of securing an athletic scholarship to either the Jesuit high school or the Christian Brothers' high school, we need to take a good, long look at what we provide for minorities in our public schools.

We can and must restore public confidence in our schools. It will be no easy task, but, once having admitted that the play period of the 1960's and 1970's is over, we can work toward a better educational system than ever.

All those dire reports suggest discontent, of course. But I would like to stray from those reports in suggesting several implications for our middle schools. Each of these suggestions is based on some advantage we now possess, but have ignored or allowed to go to waste. For our own educational survival, we need to restore these educational virtues.

First of all, we have cultural diversity. Unfortunately, we allowed integration to scare us off the most unique advantage enjoyed by American education. The minute the Supreme Court told us we had to integrate all the races and cultures—for the first time, consciously—we resisted.

Now is the time to reverse this pattern. Forget the Supreme Court and even the local courts. See each racial, religious, sexual variety as one more opportunity to learn about our world. The Vietnamese, for instance, can teach us more than a thing or two about the original American spirit of hard work and real courage. My people, black Americans, could show you a value to reading you never dreamed. Jewish people have so much to offer from the historical and religious perspectives. The list of opportunities goes on. And it is limited only by our own paranoia and fear.

Almost all the reports agree on one thing: our elementary schools do a good job, generally; but when our children get to middle school level, everything seems to hit the proverbial fan. Why? Somewhere between third and seventh grade, we educators efficiently and officially kill imagination. Again, the reports confirm my observation: kids seem alive and open to life—until about 7th grade. Suddenly, puberty and middle school hit at the same time and childhood innocence and dreaming skid to a sudden halt.

For one thing, we move much too fast at the middle school level. If you do not agree, just go back to graduate school—on the same schedule endured by millions of junior high school students. They take six or seven classes daily, back to back. Lunch is often a rushed thirty minutes. Then come all the activities, in school and out: cheerleading, sports, musicals, newspapers, clubs. Some parents simply will not ever come to my school. The pace, they say, is simply too fast, too loud. Perhaps, it may be time to slow down and let our middle school kids be kids.

Which brings me to my second point. What ever happened to childhood? the wide-eyed child is gone. In his place stands the twelve-year-old stud who knows just where to get the "stuff" (drugs), how to "suck face" (kiss) and, most importantly, how to "drop the pigs" (avoid law enforcement officers). The pressure we put on young girls is even worse. They have to wear just the right clothes, associate with just the right group and be asked to the right parties, dances, and school clubs.

We need to take another look at some of our school sponsored activities in middle school. Rather than promoting social development, we may really be killing the child. Are endless dances and "socials" the only method we have? Are cheerleaders necessary or even appropriate at this level? (Forget any discussion of the sexist implications!)

Naturally, our pubescent students will pursue some of these activities on their own. But many will not, motivated by either parental or religious guidance. Just as we respect adult privacy, perhaps our middle schools ought to respect our adolescents' rights to childhood, free of adult baggage.

Painful as it may have been, integration has revealed an educational gold mine in our impoverished and minority students. And one of the reasons the educational reports gave us such poor grades may rest with our benign neglect of those same students. According to the national report, 40% of our minority students can not read. "Street" estimates go as high as 60%. The Hispanic dropout rate runs as high as 40%, even though demographic studies proved that they will constitute the bulk of the work force in the Southwest by the year 2000. There must be a better way.

For one thing, we can continue to improve teacher training programs. Sweeping programs are already in place in most of our local colleges and universities. Much more on-the-job training is being done to give prospective teachers a better feel for the communities in which they will teach. Colleges of education are making great strides in keeping a closer watch on the communities to which their students will go. By so doing, they avoid one of the major pitfalls of integration: training teachers for one kind of community, only to find that the reality is miles away from the theory. Teachers of all races and backgrounds seem to be coming into our schools much better prepared for what they will face. They have not been given a rosey picture, only to face a hostile gang of students, crying for blood.

But, on a second front, we still have not made the required progress. Too many teachers still expect less from minority students and seem afraid to demand the high standards so often expected of white, middle-class students.

We have to take that racist bull by the horns. Demand the highest standards of the physical and academic discipline from the poor and minority students. Many of my students are either poor or minority or both. They still stand for adult visitors, dismiss by rows and recite Shakespeare, Donne, Erasmus, Lincoln and more in front of the class. There is nothing more racist or humiliating for Louis Martinez than being asked to do less than his classmates. Yet, Louis is just as thrilled as any child when, a year later, he can still remember most of Countee Cullen's sonnet, "Yet Do I Marvel." There is nothing more discouraging for his black teacher than looking at the honor roll every quarter and finding no Hispanic names. They are just as absent from student government and honor society. Instead, there are all those Vietnamese names that few of us can pronounce with any ease.

Most experts agree. One of the biggest factors in the poor showing of the minority and poor students is teacher expectation. If we want to improve the one, we have to improve the other.

I just cannot resist telling this story. Remember that principal's line about what kids can relate to? About a year later, I was substituting at a junior high school. The class was seventh-grade English and was full of Chicano students. No one was looking, so why not try out some of John Donne's Holy Sonnets on these kids? Since they had been so good, I read the sonnet that begins, "Wilt Thou forgive that sin where I begun/Which is my sin, though it were done before?" Line by line those "disadvantaged" children interpreted the entire sonnet and understood Donne's point clearly. As I was leaving the classroom, a student asked, "Mr. Bowman, if we're good tomorrow, can we do some more poetry?"

Finally, a quiet word about something we have and have always had, but which is being threatened by the Moral Majority (which is neither) and the Atheist Minority (which is both). Our moral values and character have to be restored to good health if our schools are to survive. I am not suggesting that we all join Jerry Falwell in his dubious crusades, nor that we help the Texas couple with their book-burning zeal for the Lord.

I am saying that we really out to go back to some spiritual basics: honesty, respect for other human beings, value for solitude, and silent communion with our God.

One child, who is angry with me, sees no reason for not approaching her hysterically religious mother with the "fact" that, after nouns, verbs, and adjectives, I will cover Sex (with a capital "S") for exactly two weeks. She is a very religious child, but somehow or another, basic honesty got lost along the way. I warn another student not to plagiarize, and he warns me, "Judge not, lest ye be judged." As long as I did not legally catch him in the act, I should not judge. With what Robert Bolt called the "shrug of the perjurer," the *Bible*-quoting student reduces honesty to a legal formula.

How about respect for others? We are not so obliged, say some "religious" leaders, as "those sinners" who do not agree with our views. Our students learn very quickly from such bad examples. Kids who are "different" in any way are subjected to abuse by students and, sometimes, teachers. Again the *Bible* can be quoted to justify any maltreatment of "sinners."

I think we can take better advantage of our moral heritage and that, along with other actions, a spiritual restoration can restore health to public education.

These are a few simple observations from the junior high school trenches. They are not the infallible pronouncements of an educational expert, but the expression of love and concern from one who sees teaching as a personal, precious and sacred vocation from God.

COMMON DENOMINATORS IN EFFECTIVE MIDDLE LEVEL SCHOOLS

James P. Garvin

This chapter resulted from my work as a site visitor to twenty-two middle level schools located throughout New England, as assigned by the Secondary Schools Recognition Program which was sponsored by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. Dialogue with site visitors assigned to other parts of the country provided additional insights.

The school recognition program was established to call attention to a group of unusually successful schools on the secondary level—both high schools and schools for early adolescents. In addition to acknowledging these schools, Secretary Bell also proposed that a network of such exemplary schools could serve as models for other schools and districts concerned about improvement.

The program operated as follows:

- ... Chief State School Officers nominated schools for the national program according to procedures developed to suit their individual states.

- ... Nomination forms submitted to the national program were reviewed by two 18-member panels of educational leaders from around the country. (No federal officials served on the panels.)

- ... During the first meeting, finalists were assigned a two-day site visitor.

- ... Site visitors conducted interviews with students, teachers, parents and community groups, school support staff, and district administrators. Site visitors also observed instruction in all areas of the curriculum and inspected indoor and outdoor physical facilities. (No federal officials served as site visitors.)

- ... Along with original nomination forms, extensive written and verbal site visit reports were carefully examined.

- ... Recognized schools were recommended to Secretary Bell for national attention. These schools received a specially designed flag during a ceremony at the White House. Plaques were also presented at local ceremonies.

In the 1983-84 program, 261 middle level schools were put into nomination and 88 received national recognition. A preliminary review of the information on the schools indicated that 60% were suburban, 27% were urban, with the remaining 12% classified as rural.

FINDINGS

The factors I've listed are those that were identified by the various constituent groups within these schools as critical to effectiveness. Listed are six common denominators identified in the effective middle level schools I visited.

I. A clearly defined and articulated mission

Both Ernest Boyer in his report, *High School*, and Milton Goldberg, Executive Director of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, which sponsored the highly publicized report *A Nation at Risk*, recommend that schools work to define their mission as basic to all else. In the effective schools I visited, mission was an item which had been carefully developed into a master plan that gave meaning, direction, and context to existing programs. These mission statements were developed by representatives of all groups that made up the

school community—parents, students, teachers, administration, and support staff. These statements clearly defined the role of the school usually beginning with an understanding of early adolescent development characteristics. Consequently, as I interviewed I found that constituent groups were not only aware of the need for such a mission statement, but they could articulate it well. These people clearly understood the role of the school within the K-12 system, yet they knew the uniqueness of their work. They knew they were not to be an elementary school or a high school, but a transition from the former to the latter. This articulation was made clear beyond the middle level to other levels, leading to a clearer understanding system-wide of the function and objectives of the middle level school. I found that curriculum, organization, evaluation and staff development grew out of these statements, and existing programs proved to be very consistent with the stated global objectives.

2. Effective leadership

This common denominator is recommended in almost every national report. The *Nation at Risk* report, although not a report on middle level education, clearly expresses the belief that effective leadership is necessary to carry out the reforms mentioned in the report. The report calls it "responsible leadership," but fails to specify what it is. Ernest Boyer states emphatically that principals must become "instructional leaders," but once again the practitioner is left with a vague definition. The same holds true in the writings of John I. Goodlad, Mortimer Adler, and others. It became obvious to me and to those I interviewed that these schools were effective primarily because they had committed, informed, courageous and dynamic leadership. Beyond these adjectives I asked for specific characteristics of the principals. These characteristics seemed to fall into three categories.

First, the principals had *human skills*. They were approachable, interested more in people than in competencies, and they projected a self-confidence from which a concentration on others was natural. These people were teacher centered, freeing teachers to be student centered, which resulted in masterful, creative ideas erupting into exciting programs. These principals made it their business to know students by first names, to write "thank you" notes to students and staff, to be at after school events, and to build up their school as a "nice place to be" through every public relations gimmick possible. They were accessible to parents, students and staff whenever necessary.

Second, they had *management skills*. They knew how to make effective use of time by reorganizational techniques. They were willing to give over scheduling, grouping, and discipline to teachers, allowing more ownership in the operation of the school. They moved to teaming patterns, giving teachers opportunities to work with a common group of students and a common planning time from which to develop their skills in a collaborative effort. In some cases teachers worked together on interdisciplinary teams, and in other cases, through projects worked out before or after school. Teams developed their own leadership, leaving the principal to operate in a facilitator role. These principals appeared to be able to keep in mind their own ideas long enough to determine how to include the input of the gifts and skills of their staff. Third, these principals had *technical skills*. They were informed about curriculum, organization, evaluation, support programs, personnel work, politics and most importantly the unique characteristics of the early adolescent. They were competent educators, well-read, up-to-date with current research, involved on professional committees, and eager to examine ways to improve their school. There was no doubt in my mind and in the minds of the groups I interviewed that leadership was the key to their effective schools.

3. Student centered teachers

Contrary to the emphasis on curriculum specialization in most of the national reports, I found that effectiveness in these schools was closely linked to the commitment of the teacher to the total life of the student. These teachers were more concerned about encouraging students to understand "how" to learn rather than "what" to learn. They used higher order questioning skills, encouraging students to discover rather than be told answers. Subject content was used as a vehicle to teach skills for continuous learning in life. Teachers knew about the unique problems of teaching this age group and demonstrated clear instruction to identified cognitive levels. Teachers were often scheduled into advisor/advisee sessions or were assigned to a home-base guidance function. Many of the teachers I saw were involved in courses designed to develop high-interest activities for student and to provide more opportunities for guidance work. All of these activities clearly allowed teachers opportunities to mix with students in a relaxed, non-evaluative atmosphere from which to ascertain the students' learning needs. The result of these efforts was manifested in a climate which was safe, exciting and highly motivational. Contrary to popular opinion and the inferences of the national reports, these student-centered programs did not lead to mediocrity, but rather to increased interest in school and better achievement scores on standardized tests.

4. Strong parent involvement

The national reports do not make specific recommendations regarding parent involvement in the life of a school. However, I found parent involvement crucial to school effectiveness. The parent groups I interviewed were very involved in the life of the school. Some served on PTO groups whose undertakings included raising monies to support student and teacher activities; organizing professional experiences to better inform parents on educational issues; serving as conduits to other parents on school activities; and providing assistance to faculty for special activities. Parents told me how welcomed and comfortable they felt in their children's school. They were satisfied with the progress reports on their children and the general communication from school to home. They were pleased with the accessibility of teachers and administrators when needed. I saw parents serving as aides in classrooms, in the library, in the office, and in special activities. I saw one parent who had volunteered to teach Russian three days a week to a group of 15 seventh graders. The parent involvement in these schools brought a healthy home/school climate which threatened no one, but rather provided a stronger support base for programs in the school. Teachers and administrators told me that such parent involvement was basic to the success of the school.

5. Ongoing goal development and evaluation

Interestingly enough, the national reports in and of themselves are designed to cause schools to evaluate themselves and bring about the necessary reforms. Each of the schools I visited had already done in-service work to read and discuss these reports in an attempt to improve their programs. Most of the schools were very disappointed that these reports did not reflect their middle grades levels. Nevertheless, I found that these schools were actively involved in the evaluation process. One principal told me that in this business no one stands still—either you're going forward or you're going behind! Another told me that his school reorganized four years ago and tried to live on the novelty of the new experiences. Two years later they fell from the peak and slowly degenerated. He found that it was easier to start a new program than to sustain it, and that sustaining an effective school depends on constant evaluation and re-tooling. I found a healthy respect for evaluation, which grew out of a healthy environment of respect for one another as people and as professionals. Committees were in place—made up of faculty, administrators, and in some cases, students—to evalu-

ate, refine and implement programs. These committees represented such programs as curriculum, instruction, management and discipline, faculty morale, professional growth, faculty governance, student activities and special events.

6. Quality of life

After completing all of my interviews, I was curious to see, through personal reflection and dialogue with other site visitors, if I could put my finger on the most important single variable which might have the greatest effect on successful schooling in these middle level institutions. My colleague, Howard Johnston (1984) who was also a site visitor in the original program conducted in 1983, wrote a paper outlining his experiences. His thoughts helped me better understand my own reflections. He concluded (and I thoroughly agree) that perhaps the single most important variable for the success of these schools is the high quality of adults in them! In every school I visited over the past two years, I was struck by the tone in the building that resulted from adults who truly cared about each other and were interested in each other's lives! In my interviews with different groups of students I asked, "What makes this such a good place to attend school?" The majority of first responses was that teachers make the difference! "What makes a good teacher?", I probed. They responded along these lines: "A person who is approachable, has a sense of humor, cares about students is willing to stay after school and help, participates in student activities, and is encouraging." These responses came from the "turn-around students" as well as the academically talented. This respect for the adults in these schools evolved from a concentrated effort by teachers to be student centered, and from a mutual respect between teachers, supported by teacher-centered leadership. The outcome was a community in which kids were happy, confident, productive, and proud of their schools.

CONCLUSION

My observations revealed additional findings which cannot be categorized as elements of the above common denominators, but which are nevertheless valuable to this study. I found a strong emphasis on applied and fine arts, which in some cases were integrated into the basic core subjects. Students averaged about two hours of homework a night but had time during the school day to work on it. Classes were exciting with a high level of activity. I saw very few classroom management problems. Rules were minimal and clearly displayed. Most of these schools used some form of the assertive discipline technique. Classrooms themselves were bright, highlighted by student work on display. The buildings were clean and well maintained inside and out.

Let me state in conclusion that not once in my visits did I find that effectiveness was related to increased curriculum, extended school days or school year, or additional foreign language courses, all of which were recommended by the *Nation at Risk* report. I did find a strong interest in computer instruction but some hesitation to add these courses at the expense of exploratory courses. Every school I visited had an established core of curriculum, which was not a revolutionary idea to these people.

As one reads the national reports, one should keep in mind that the recommendations are not necessarily based on effective schools but are, instead, recommendations for correcting ineffective schools. The findings of the Secondary Schools Recognition Program reveal factors that are responsible for effectiveness in identified exemplary schools. I find it interesting that these findings, at least on the middle grade level, do not often agree with those of the national reports.

SECTION III.

Achieving Educational Reform

Section I was designed to familiarize the reader with some of the more publicized national education reports. Section II then took a more in-depth look at the implications of these reports on middle school education. This section takes the reader beyond an awareness level of the issues, as presented in the previous sections, and presents some suggestions as to how we, as middle school educators, can become involved in the process of educational reform.

Awareness of the issues is not enough. If these issues are to be legitimately addressed we must become involved. In the proceeding sections the reader was presented with such a challenge. However, it is often easier to merely recognize the need for change than it is to translate that sense of awareness into action.

In this section, Dr. Burke suggests that "Power, Politics, and Leadership" are the missing links for producing meaningful educational reform. He not only shows us the importance of the relationships between these three elements for producing change in our schools, but gives us some practical suggestions as to how educators can use these three elements to become a strong link rather than the missing link in educational reform.

POWER, POLITICS, AND LEADERSHIP: THE MISSING LINKS

Daniel J. Burke

Power, politics, and leadership, heretofore notably ignored as salient forces in education reform, will likely determine the extent to which public schools remain vital and responsive for the remainder of this century. School systems are presently without political impact. Their leaders remain substantially powerless in either effecting change or promoting better schools, in spite of the recent deluge of national reports and reform rhetoric. The absence or misuse of power, politics, and leadership have encouraged and often directly produced curricular mediocrity, organizational conformity, and institutional irrelevance. Unfortunately, these conditions are no less surprising than they are new. Why, then, have these three critical elements, basic to the functioning and survival of other societal institutions, so acutely eluded the American educational enterprise?

Attempts at revising the situation will likely be unsuccessful primarily because educational leaders continue to ignore political realities in general and those pertinent to reform in particular. As a consequence, educators, void of sufficient political and leadership astuteness, remain unable to do anything other than respond to an overwhelming need to maintain the status quo. V. O. Key (1964) recognized the problem nearly two decades ago:

In modern societies the school system, in particular, functions as a formidable instrument of political power in its roles as a transmitter of goals, values, and attitudes of policy. In the selection of values and attitudes to be inculcated, it chooses those cherished by the dominant elements in the political order. By and large the impact of widely accepted goals, mores, and social values fixes the programs of American schools. When schools diverge from this vaguely defined directive and collide with potent groups in the political system, they feel a pressure to conform. (p. 12-13)

Public education has become a monopoly, in fact, a monolithic monopoly, in this century. The inconsistency resulting from maintaining a monolithic educational system while ignoring pluralistic needs and the very nature of American society, is indefensible, if not grossly hypocritical. Adding insult to injury, schools randomly admonish autocratic power systems, yet operationally they remain both autocratic and authoritarian. In fact, and seemingly on the increase, schools continue to allow themselves to take on characteristics and practices frequently associated with those of the military and prisons (Weinstock, 1973). Authoritarian operated schools, when imposed on their constituencies, diminishes not only the legitimacy of a democratic society but often leadership as well. The producing of ill-formed, inexperienced, and apathetic citizens is more than a by-product of such schools. This continuing incongruence between a society based upon choices, freedom, liberty, opportunity, individuality, openness and justice, and a public school system where those same elements are found wanting, threatens the purposes and the effectiveness of the education enterprise and, perhaps, its survival. Power, politics, and leadership, their absence or abuse, may well be the major contributors to present educational ills. Most certainly, they remain the salient factors which have impeded reform and, in turn, prevented the educational systems' ability to be responsive to the needs and goals of society.

The Nature of Power and Politics

Power is a subject about which both individuals and groups know little, assume much, selectively concern themselves, occasionally fight and argue over, but without exception, seek. Simply defined, power is the ability to perform effectively. Implied in this definition are components of strength, force, control, even authority. These terms need not have negative connotations, for they have allowed both individuals and nations to emerge into powerful leadership positions. In turn, personal, social and national welfare, protection of individual and group rights, a system of laws and a government by, for and of the people all have been largely sustained through the utilization of power and politics.

Power, indeed political action, has had a variety of sources controlling and reforming both individual and social behaviors. Industrialists, the clergy, military officials, police officers, political bodies and others have been at one time or another a major source of authority. Not until the eighteenth century did political ideologies offer a new theory of power . . . that it be given to the masses; that, in fact, power would "go to the people." Indeed, without man's consent to be ruled, led, or reformed, mere power is futile. Certainly, men like Jefferson and Lincoln realized that without WILL and JUSTICE, power was truly meaningless. Power through consent, then, became the "democratic" means of governance in the free world. Such ideals as "liberty with corresponding responsibility" emerged, along with the right to dissent, up to and including overthrowing those in command. Today, the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights are essentially based upon these ideals.

Both users and abusers of power are evident throughout civilization. When power has been subjected to misguided leadership, or when inappropriately levied, it has produced damaging consequences. Even then, history records, the checks and balances within a democracy have prevented serious delays in eradicating errors of power application. Although battle scared, the basic democratic ideals, which relate directly to power utilization, have been tested time and time again. No thinking American will ever forget the misuse of power in the highest governmental levels during the early mid-seventies. Democracy in action, with its intended tolerant elasticity, was vividly witnessed by millions during the Watergate period. People who doubted its strength, even its principles, couldn't deny democracy's persistence as a unique and effective system of applying authority and power. Power and justice *did* ultimately combine, as it must in a democracy, not only to control power abuse, but to ensure the rights of individuals who, indeed, form the power base. The democratic system *is* unique, not because its victories have far exceeded its defeats, but because its existence is derived from individual power which when collectively tabulated formulates societal policy. What is even more remarkable is that this process works not only at the highest governmental levels, it is equally effective in small and informal group behavior.

Without power and politics, democracy could not work or even exist. To ignore the importance of wise power utilization and its corresponding political savvy is to deny freedom, justice, even democracy itself. About that, there is no debate. There is, however, a growing concern about the political roles and reality that face contemporary America. Loss of confidence in leadership at all levels of government, questions as to government's ability to solve social and economic problems, a decreasing interest in and confidence among labor and management groups, and a decreasing interest in and confidence about the political process itself are examples that challenge all free people. While all is not well with the Republic, democracy is *not* on the threshold of anarchy.

It is possible, however, that politics and power are becoming too sophisticated and too far removed from the citizenry. By increasing interest in and in knowledge of power and politics, societal frustration and political ineptness can be significantly reduced. At the same time, rational reform efforts are more likely to emerge as means of ensuring a healthy and vital society. Seemingly, the educational system would be the ideal place to begin those processes. It won't be, however, without the sanctioned and effective use of power, politics, and leadership designed to produce the needed reforms called for both in and outside of the educational establishment.

Power, Politics and Educational Reform

The nature of power and politics, and their relationship to educational reform, is *the* issue separating a consistently viable school system from one which is presently incapable of responding to a drastically different and changing society. Utilization of power and politics to reform educational systems is widely misunderstood, if understood at all. Merging these two forces with educational reform is not only timely but essential if schools and their leaders are to function at a level beyond that of merely maintaining the status quo. In fact, without this merger, maintaining the status quo is itself an act of futility.

Urgent efforts to prepare politically knowledgeable educators must become a high priority if serious reform is to be achieved. Using power and politics appropriately, and understanding the degree to which they effect reform, is at the heart of making education vital and responsive to societal needs. Historically, the ability of educational leaders to effectively use power or to engage in political activity has remained nearly analogous to the static and unchanged nature of public education—not much has changed in either domain. To survive as a strong nation, both must be reformed. Power and politics are essentially responsible for public education since state legislatures, through power and politics, create and control educational systems. With an increasing need for adherence to federal mandates and legislation, educational reform will thrive or survive to the extent that it merges with both power and politics. Witness as examples P. L. 94-142, increasing federal intervention and control, recently initiated block grants, controversy surrounding usage of public funds for private schools, the sporadic but continuing question of church-state separation, creationism/evolution conflicts, and the more intriguing questions of governmental censorship. Added to those emotion generating issues (only a few of which embrace reform) are fundamental concerns about the *authority* for schools to reform fundamental institutional aspects such as organization, staffing, curriculum, and finance, all of which are state affiliated or regulated. There are many more such issues, all basically deriving their controversy and subsequent reform popularity through dilemmas about and confusion over politics and struggles for power. The significance of these examples is to illustrate that power and politics, no matter what the source, will continue to be wholly tied to education reform. In order to survive, educational reformers must respond much differently to politics and power if problem resolution is to coincide with individual and societal values and needs.

Interestingly, education—to be sure, its reform—is at a self-imposed disadvantage when it comes to initiating reform or even tolerating it. Schools are not being successfully reformed through present uses of power and politics because they are often autocratic and their leaders often authoritarian. Beyond these conditions, questions about reform through usage of power and politics must be raised:

- Can wise utilization of power and politics lead to meaningful reform in schools and, if so, to what extent?
- How "democratic," by American standards, should be the process of educational reform?
- Should schools become "reform environments" where democratic principles (use of power and politics) are the methods and the means for having students experience what *is* rather than what *ought* to be?
- Should school reform foster opportunities for joint and broad-based decision making along with promoting activities which will require shared responsibility and accountability in ensuring the honorable use of power and politics?
- Do processes exist in school environments for equal treatment and justice which will encourage positive attitudes about reform by all who have a stake in the educational system?
- Should reform result in schools becoming "live" (politically active) rather than "prepare for" (read about) institutions?
- To what extent should youth learn the value and workings of reform strategies associated with power and politics?
- What risks are there in giving emphasis to societal change through the reformation of the educational system itself?
- Is it too dangerous or threatening for students to learn about, and to question, reform when that reform might be thwarted or ridiculed by teachers or administrators at the helm of the school?
- Should efforts at educational reform undergo the risks and the occasional inconvenience relative to the potential liabilities associated with power and politics even though they are an integral part of the American society and the real world?

In spite of the serious and difficult dialogue that will develop from an examination of these questions, the *opportunity* for reforming schools has never been more feasible. The means and methods of introducing, understanding, and utilizing power and politics in the formal educational reform process are readily accessible. Justification, experience and success abound as evidenced by, among others: (a) the recent and highly publicized commission reports which heightened public interest in educational reform; (b) increased political activity by lay-citizens in school board, budget and special elections; (c) growing numbers of educational reform lobbyists; (d) wide-spread militancy of highly organized educational unions and their reform-oriented agendas; (e) a decade of reform efforts which resulted in the proliferation of public "alternative schools"; (f) heated debates over negotiated contracts; (g) formalized personnel grievance procedures; and (h) more frequent power struggles over federal, state and local control of education. The present societal and professional climate, then, would quite naturally permit the study and practice of utilizing power and politics in educational reform.

Perhaps the essence of and relationship to educational reform of both power and politics is better enhanced through the following perspectives:

- Is it not the educator who so frequently (and out of ignorance) recites the slogan: "Keep politics out of education and education out of politics?" Wisdom and reform mandate exactly the opposite!
- Like many other societal issues and governance processes, most educational reform issues and leadership strategies are political.
- Political savvy and the formidable usage of power determine educational reform impact. Without such impact, schools and societies remain unchanged.
- Since change and reform are political in nature, it follows that both will be *politically* responsive and likely to yield political solutions.
- As a group, educators have not mobilized enough power to legitimize major policy changes. Without combining efforts with other power groups (e.g. parents, students and legislative groups), significant educational reform will not be forthcoming.
- It is, in the final sense, quite possible to be committed to education in general, to schools in particular and, at the same time, be disinterested in politics, power and reform.

Leadership for Educational Reform:

Leadership efforts continue to suffer from misguided power seekers, would-be reformers and ill-advised spokespersons within and outside of the profession, some of whom have "powered" themselves right out of their levels of competency! Through all of the power-related struggles, the many errors, inhumane acts, poor if not wrong decisions, and all the rest, power has not corrupted people—people have corrupted power. While it remains fashionable to blame the educational system when its inherent power works counter to the wishes of some of the people, some of the time, it needs to be remembered that it is the systems' *leaders* that wave the wand casting the direction power takes. Leaders, therefore, must necessarily assume the responsibility and accountability for both the use of power and the resulting reform efforts. Having power is a part of being a leader, nearly inescapable; using it in an art, frequently indeterminable. The successful leader recognizes that it is the "art" that separates the wise from the foolish, the power-holders from the power-seekers and the reformers from the revolutionists.

Those having power, especially those who seek it, and those holding positions to which power is entrusted, must continually be aware of the inequities, dangers and abuses of leadership in the name of reform. Reformers have not always been successful in preventing inequities in the application of power and justice. Many examples of reform-laden issues, thrust into the hands of less than capable leaders, have become indelibly and unfortunately all too real to many: women, the elderly, the economically distressed, those who are ethnically and culturally different, and the academically less talented, to name a few. The term "reform" to these groups, that is, reform in the sense of being able to improve their destinies or even to reach a "status quo" standard of living, has frequently met with utter defeat. The result of these and similar situations is an increasingly negative attitude toward all leaders and toward the reforms they seek. It is, after all, the psychological nature of feeling less than equal that often negates newly acquired power because it is the *wise use* of power, not simply *having* power that determines success and, in turn, that generates feelings of equality or security.

A thoughtful and critical review of the leadership function in schools and its relationship to power, politics, and reform may be enhanced through the following perspectives:

- Very basically, *people do not want power*, particularly as it relates to responsibility or accountability, but they in every case *want the right to have power* or to make decisions.
- One reason educational reform continues to be slow is due to serious awareness gaps between leadership styles, strategies and political astuteness.
- Both formal and informal power structures can be best understood, confronted or accommodated by a keen insight into individual and group *power bases*.
- The framework upon which a source of power is derived determines leadership credibility, effectiveness and longevity; knowing the *real* base of power is fundamental to surviving as a leader.
- Good leaders become good politicians. Reality, like it or not, suggests positive correlations between effective leaders and successful politicians.
- Viewing people as having unequal power is to be politically savvy; all people are equal, it's just that some are more equal than others.

Educational leaders with experience, competency, a sense of justice, a healthy degree of compassion for others, and ethical soundness, will more likely effectively orchestrate reform. When they appropriately utilize power and politics, leaders dramatically improve their chances for reform success. Until educational leaders mount vigorous, learned and persistent campaigns for change processes, all programs, and the people responsible for reform within educational systems, will increasingly be ignored or rendered insignificant.

The Concepts and the Issues: A Summary

Identifying a number of power and political issues impacting educational reform along with citing ways to effectively address each may be helpful to the leader interested in promoting successful reform. The following is a list of ten general issues that are closely related to politics, power, leadership, and, in turn, to educational reform. Each issue is followed by a set of statements which suggests appropriate actions or strategies in addressing the issues.

1. Leadership and Management
 - lead by example, not by title
 - learn how to compromise, to negotiate
 - evaluate motives, strategies, and outcomes
 - maintain professionalism in personal ways
 - establish "win-win" situations
2. Decision Making and Idea Ownership
 - share the process; seek involvement
 - favor consensus over voting
 - utilize "grass-roots" approaches
 - identify authority checks and balances
 - Listen-Evaluation-Anticipate-Decide

3. Communication and Feedback
 - respond to and seek feedback; timeliness
 - assess weaknesses in communication systems
 - practice oral and written communication
 - build two-way communication relationships
 - open new avenues of communication
4. We/They Syndromes
 - refine terminology: “we, they, our, us, mine”
 - develop a “loyal opposition” concept
 - discourage “winner and loser” outcomes
 - know “we” as a power base: “they” have one too
 - remember that to have a case *for* there must be a case *against*
 - include “school and district-wide well-being” assignments for all leadership personnel
 - recognize and reward cooperative leadership efforts
5. Territorialism and Turf
 - promote unity with diversity among leadership efforts
 - establish and insist upon the “whole-picture” with colleagues
 - cross-assign (re-assign) personnel to ensure “togetherness”
 - insist upon quality over quantity with leadership personnel
 - examine own motives prior to assessing others
6. Motives and Legitimation
 - turn all “threats” into “challenges”
 - display and organize a systematic and consistent leadership style
 - establish legitimacy through performance
 - select “safe” projects in beginning reform activities
 - consider the “50-50” chance concept
7. Risk Orientation
 - encourage selected risk-taking
 - reward those who are responsible risk-takers
 - if you don’t want the answer, don’t ask the question
 - utilize this formula as a strategy:
 - need*-gap between what *is* and what *ought* to be
 - condition*-what is
 - objective*-what ought to be
 - strategy*-procedure for fulfilling need
 - evaluation*-analysis and results
8. Planning Strategies and Implementation
 - insist on action soon after initial planning
 - match “styles” with “tasks” in assigning personnel
 - promote experimentation through encouragement, experience and rewards
 - become a strategist; good strategies produce reform success
 - assign responsibilities *only* with corresponding accountability and authority

9. Accountability and Responsibility

- clarify roles and responsibilities
- delegate—based upon expertise and interests
- define acceptable levels of accountability
- recognize and reward those who take on additional responsibility
- prioritize areas that need reform
- select personnel capable of successful reform

10. Change and Innovation

- develop "grass-roots" processes
- establish innovation as priority
- insist that one-half of all leadership activity be directed toward reform

To prevail as an educational reformer is to equate political savvy with administrative sophistication. Most educational leaders are confronted regularly with crisis issues with which they are forced to struggle, ignore, or face unacceptable outcomes, often including sacrifice of integrity. These situations can no longer be tolerated if school reform is to remain a viable alternative to maintaining the status quo. Since most every educational reform or leadership issue is political in nature, wise leaders must seek political solutions. Simply applying power is insufficient; the non-educated can do that. Reform issues that involve people demand that power and politics be wisely, honorably, and humanely applied; and only talented leaders can do that. The uncommonly astute leader has learned that to separate power and politics from leadership is to deny success for themselves and for the systems they purportedly wish to reform.

Power and politics will continue to make a difference in the lives of people, their institutions, and their means of survival. As the world becomes smaller, more complex and less tolerant, the more crucial it is for the educational system to both practice and teach that which enhances personal success. Without using power and political activity effectively, the problems now apparent, those anticipated and those yet to be revealed will go unchallenged and unresolved. Power and politics are overtly inherent in the educational reform arena. They always have been. But now educators must become sophisticated in their application. Being politically astute is no longer a luxury, it's a necessity, not only for reforming education but for ensuring its survival.

REFERENCES

- Key, V. O. (1964). *Politics, and pressure groups*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell.
- Weinstock, Ruth. (1973). *The greening of the high school*. New York: Educational Facilities Laboratories.

SECTION IV.

Conclusions

It is an interesting paradox that the commission which Secretary Bell established in August, 1981, was named "The National Commission on Excellence in Education." The word EXCELLENCE in its title gave the commission a tone that denoted a positive, forward looking mission of assessing our educational system. However, the title of the final report, which was submitted some eighteen months later, had a different tone to it "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform." The words *risk*, *imperative*, and *reform* became "buzz words" which caught the attention of the media and foreshadowed a rash of studies and reports which attempted to do their own diagnosis of the ills of education. In fact, one of the reasons why the "Nation at Risk" and the subsequent reports gained such notoriety was not because of the issues they raised alone, but the fact that these issues were all being addressed at one time. Thus, the "rising tide of mediocrity" became a tidal wave.

One only needs to look at the track record of educators in handling the demands for educational reform to realize the problems faced in reacting to the reports. As educators, we were caught between the proverbial rock and a hard place. If we over-reacted it was viewed by the public as an attempt to whitewash the ills of education. If we reacted in a knee jerk fashion we ran the risk of accepting the short term, quick-fix solutions to the complex issues facing us in education.

Although the issues raised by these reports were numerous, they were not new and the solutions proposed in most of the reports were left open for wide interpretation. Often these recommendations were stated in a very simplistic manner and when literally interpreted became counter productive to that which is educationally sound for students. The problem for over simplifying these solutions has become much more serious as state and local agencies begin to develop policies based on these recommendations. Several examples of how state and local agencies have opted for quick-fix solutions are cited by the authors in Section II, such as lengthening the school day, giving more homework, eliminating elective courses, etc.

We, as educators, are faced with the challenge of addressing these issues with respect to what we know to be in the best interest of the students with whom we work. We can neither afford to over react or, worse yet, not react at all. For if we do either we run the risk of having little input into the decision making process and then having to live with decisions that are not in the best interest of students.

Although the national studies have provided a unique challenge to education in general, they have provided an even more unique challenge to middle level education. The middle

school movement has gained tremendous momentum over the past decade and a half. Many school systems across the nation have taken a strong look at what they have or have not provided at the intermediate education level. They have then also taken this opportunity to make a recommitment to the concept of providing the best educational environment possible for the young adolescent. They have made a commitment to creating a special educational program that is unique to this age level. They have moved away from the concept that middle level education should be just a mirror image of the high school or a mere extension of the elementary school. The middle school has begun to emerge with an identity of its own and has moved away from the idea that it is just something in between elementary and high school which a child goes through, preferably as quickly as possible.

Even though the middle school concept has been widely accepted and educational practices compatible with this philosophy have been tried and proven successful there is still a lack of knowledge by the general public about middle schools. This lack of understanding is clearly evident when one looks at the national studies and finds most of the studies fail to even make a passing reference to this level. It would be naive to assume that middle level education was not mentioned because there were no concerns. Rather the reports probably did not specifically elude to it because it was seen as part of secondary education and should be dealt with as a part of the problems identified at that level. Thus, middle level education faces a double problem of not only justifying those educational practices which have been proven to be educationally sound for this age level but at the same time helping the general public understand the purpose of middle school education. If the later can not be accomplished it will be very difficult to justify the existence of middle schools as anything other than extensions of the high schools. Even the most well thought-out solutions for problems at the high school would not likely be appropriate for middle school. To lump middle school back in with secondary education would be turning the clock back twenty or thirty years.

The middle school movement could not have been as successful and widespread as it is today if it were not based on sound educational principles. There can be no stronger philosophical base than that of striving to create an educational environment that will meet the needs of the student it serves. However, no matter how sound the philosophical base, the middle school still runs the risk of failing if the people most closely associated to it do not believe in it. Fortunately, most middle school teachers and administrators are firmly committed to the things middle school stands for because they are firmly committed to working with this age level.

Even though middle school is based on sound philosophy and has wide support among middle school educators, it does not enjoy that same support and commitment among the general public. In fact, the middle school is not readily accepted by elementary, secondary or post-secondary educators. This lack of support is not an indication of any anti-middle school sentiment, but rather an indication of a lack of knowledge concerning the age level and the educational needs of it.

People not directly connected with middle school education often have differing perceptions of the purpose of education at this level. Unfortunately, most perceive it as they themselves experienced it, which generally emphasized a secondary focus. Overcoming these perceptions has become a critical issue in the establishment of a strong identity for middle school (an identity based on the idea of creating a quality education for the pre- and early adolescent).

The essence of any of the national reports likewise emphasizes improving the quality of education in our schools. Or, though the middle school movement is dedicated to providing quality education, it is still in the process of becoming. There are many questions and concerns that still need to be addressed. Thus, the problem underlying the national reports and their impact on middle school education is not whether middle school should be questioned, but whether the questions and resulting recommendations are appropriate for improving the quality of education at this level.

If a doctor prescribed medication without diagnosing the illness, it might be fatal to the patient. It would be just as unethical for a doctor to prescribe the same medication for two patients with different illnesses. Likewise, the national, state and local reports must address issues relevant to middle schools. Recommendations made for high school should also be viewed very carefully as to their effectiveness for improving the quality of education at the middle school level.

We must face our moral and professional responsibility and become actively involved in upholding those precepts which underline the middle school concept. We must not forget what middle level teachers have brought to our attention—that the well being of your students during this critical time in their lives should be foremost in the consideration and instituting of any educational reform. We must install or maintain the essential elements of exemplary middle schools. Most importantly, we must be willing to become involved in the power, politics, and leadership as suggested by Daniel Burke if we are to hold onto the middle school ideal of:

Providing a unique educational environment which meets the unique needs of the pre- and early adolescent during those important formative years in their lives.

SECTION V.

Selected Bibliography

I. COMMISSION REPORTS AND STUDIES OF SCHOOLING

- Adler, Mortimer J. *Paideia Problems and Possibilities: A Consideration of Questions Raised by the Paideia Proposal*. New York: McMillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1983.
- Adler, Mortimer J. *The Paideia Proposal*. New York: McMillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1982.
- Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. *Redefining General Education in American High Schools*. Alexandria, Virginia, 1983.
- Boyer, Ernest L. *High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America*. New York: Harper and Row, 1983.
- Business Higher Education Forum. *America's Competitive Challenge: The Need for a National Response*. Washington, D.C., 1983.
- Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. *Conditions of Teaching: A State by State Analysis*. New York, 1983.
- Carnegie Corporation. *Educational and Economic Progress: Toward a National Policy*. New York, 1983.
- College Entrance Examination Board. *Academic Preparation for Colleges: What Students Need to Know and Be Able to Do*. New York, 1983.
- Goodlad, John I. *A Place Called School: Prospects for the Future*. St. Louis, Missouri: McGraw-Hill, 1983.
- Kappa Delta Pi. *100 Good Schools*. Kappa Delta Pi, West Lafayette, Indiana, 1984.
- National Commission on Excellence in Education. *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1983.
- National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Commission on Educational Issues of the National Association of Independent Schools. *A Celebration of Teaching: High School in the 1980's*. Reston, Virginia, 1983.
- National Science Foundation. *Educating Americans for the Twenty-First Century*. Washington, D.C., 1983.

- Sarason, Seymour B. *The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change*. Second Edition. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1982.
- Sizer, Theodore. *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Company, 1984.
- Task Force on Education for Economic Growth. *Action for Excellence: A Comprehensive Plan to Improve Our Nation's Schools*. Denver: Education Commission of the States, 1983.
- Twentieth Century Fund. *Making the Grade: Report of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Policy*. New York, 1983.

2. SELECTED REACTIONS TO COMMISSION REPORTS AND STUDIES OF SCHOOLING

- Bakalis, Michael J. "Power and Purpose in American Education." *Phi Delta Kappan*, (September, 1983), pp. 7-13.
- Bailey, Adrienne Y. "The Educational Equality Project: Focus on Result." *Phi Delta Kappan*, (September, 1983), pp. 22-25.
- Boyer, Ernest L. "Reflections on the Great Debate of '83." *Phi Delta Kappan*, (April, 1984), pp. 525-530.
- Fin, Chester E. "The Drive for Educational Excellence." *Change*, (April, 1983), pp. 4-7.
- Goldberg, Milton and Harvey, James. "A Nation at Risk: The Report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education." *Phi Delta Kappan*, (September, 1983), pp. 14-18.
- Goodlad, John I. "What Some Schools and Classrooms Teach." *Educational Leadership*, (April, 1983), pp. 8-14.
- Goodlad, John I.; Overman, Bette C. and Sivotnik, Kenneth A. "An Overview of a Study of Schooling." *Phi Delta Kappan*, (November, 1979), pp. 174-178.
- Goodlad, John I. "Improving Schooling in the 1980's: Toward the Non-Replication of Non-Event." *Educational Leadership*, (May, 1982) pp. 568-572.
- Graham, Patricia A. "The Twentieth Century Fund Task Force Report on Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Policy." *Phi Delta Kappan*, (September, 1983), pp. 19-21.
- Howe, Harold H. "Education Moves to Center Stage: An Overview of the Recent Studies." *Phi Delta Kappan*, (November, 1983), pp. 167-172.
- Hurn, Christopher J. "The Problem with Comparisons." *Educational Leadership*, (October, 1983), pp. 7-12.
- Heckman, Paul E.; Oakes, Jeannie; and Sivotnik, Kenneth A. "Expanding the Concepts of School Renewal and Change." *Educational Leadership*, (April, 1983), pp. 26-32.
- Lapointe, Archie E. "The Good News About American Education." *Phi Delta Kappan*, (June, 1984), pp. 674-82.
- Passow, Harry A. "Tackling the Reform Reports of the 1980's." *Phi Delta Kappan*, (June, 1984), pp. 3-11.

Peterson, Paul E. "Did the Education Reports Say Anything?" *Brookings Review*, (Winter, 1983), pp. 3-11.

Torsten, Husen. "Are Standards in Middle Schools Really Lagging Behind Those of Other Countries." *Phi Delta Kappan*, (March, 1983), pp. 455-61.

Tyler, Ralph W. "The Contribution of A Study of Schooling to Educational Research." *Educational Leadership*, (April, 1983), pp. 33-34.

Walberg, Herbert J. "We Can Raise Standards." *Educational Leadership*, (October, 1983), pp. 4-6.

Wiggins, Sam P. "A View of a Place Called School." *Educational Leadership*, (April, 1983), pp. 33-37.

3. SUMMARIES OF MAJOR REPORTS ON EDUCATION

Action in the States: Progress Toward Educational Renewal, Denver, Education Commission of the States, 1984.

A Guide From Teachers to a Nation at Risk and Other Studies, Washington, D.C., National Education Association, 1983.

A Summary of Major Reports on Education, Denver, Education Commission of the States, 1983.

Education Under Study: An Analysis of Recent Major Reports on Education, Secondary Education, Chelmsford, Massachusetts, 1983.

The Nation's Response: Recent Effort to Improve Education, Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Education, 1984.

About The Authors

Craig M. Bowman is a language arts teacher at Alameda Junior High School, Jefferson County Schools, Lakewood, Colorado. In addition to being a successful middle level teacher, he is an educational columnist for the Rocky Mountain News. He has also served on the Colorado Governor's Task Force on Excellence in Education.

Bruce Brombacher is a science teacher at Jones Junior High, Upper Arlington, Ohio. He was selected as the National Teacher of the Year in 1982 and served as the only teacher representative on the National Task Force on Education for Economic Growth. He also worked as a member of the Ohio Education Association's Committee which developed the report, "Achieving Excellence in Education: A Challenge to Ohio."

Daniel J. Burke is the Dean of the College of Education at the University of Northern Colorado. Long interested in educational reform and alternative schools, Dean Burke is actively engaged in school improvement and preservice education throughout Colorado. He is presently serving on the Governor's Task Force on Excellence in Education.

James P. Garvin is a professor at Gordon College, Wenham, Massachusetts where he directs the Middle Level Education program. He also serves as the Director of the New England League of Middle Schools. He has been a representative to the National Commission on Excellence in Secondary Education—Secondary Schools Recognition Program, National Institute on Education, Washington, D.C.

Richard H. Needham is an Assistant Professor at the University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, Colorado. A former 7th grade teacher and secondary teacher in Virginia, Needham is presently the coordinator of Elementary, Middle School, Reading and Early Childhood Education, programs at UNC. His interests include social studies education and curriculum development.

John H. Swaim is an Associate Professor at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley. Swaim established the middle school teacher preparation program at U.N.C. and has also been directly involved with the development of the middle school program at the U.N.C. Laboratory School. He has been associated with middle school education on the state, regional and national levels and served as President of the National Middle School Association during 1979-80.

Conrad F. Toepfer, Jr. is an associate professor of education at the State University of New York at Buffalo. An internationally known educator, particularly in the field of middle level education, he has recently been active speaking and writing on the effects of the various commission reports on middle school education.

Publications

NATIONAL MIDDLE SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

Perspectives: Middle School Education, 1964-84	
John H. Lounsbury, ed. (190 pages)	\$9.95
Middle School Education: As I See It	
John H. Lounsbury (60 pages)	5.25
The Theory Z School: Beyond Effectiveness	
Paul S. George (112 pages)	5.95
The Team Process in the Middle School: A Handbook for Teachers Elliot Merenbloom (72 pages)	5.25
Middle Level Social Studies: From Theory to Practice	
Michael Allen and C. Kenneth McEwin (56 pages)	4.95
This We Believe	
National Middle School Association (20 pages)	3.25
Subject Area Reading in the Middle School,	
David Bishop (45 pages)	4.25
Developing Effective Middle Schools Through Faculty Participation,	
Elliot Merenbloom (58 pages)	4.50
Guidance in the Middle School: Everyone's Responsibility,	
Claire Cole (24 pages)	3.25
Teacher to Teacher, Nancy Doda (63 pages)	5.95
The Middle School in Profile,	
Lounsbury, Marani, and Compton (80 pages)	4.95
Changing From a Junior High to a Middle School	
(Filmstrip/Cassette-Georgiady and Romano)	24.95
Five R's for Middle Schools: Strategies for Teaching Affective Education,	
Faith Brown (47 pages)	2.95
Middle School Research: Selected Studies 1984	8.00
Middle School Research: Selected Studies 1983 (110 pages)	8.00
Middle School Research: Selected Studies 1982 (115 pages)	8.00
Middle School Research: Selected Studies 1981 (125 pages)	8.00
Middle School Research: Selected Studies 1980 (125 pages)	6.00
Middle School Research: Selected Studies, Volume I, 1977-79	
(124 pages)	6.00

Middle School Research: Selected Studies, Volume II, 1977-79
(63 pages)..... 5.00

Middle School Research: Selected Studies, Volume III, 1977-79
(60 pages)..... 5.00

The Emerging Adolescent: Characteristics and Educational Implications
(56 pages)..... 2.95

**Good Schools for Middle Grade Youngsters: Characteristics, Practices,
Recommendations, William Morrison (36 pages)..... 3.50**

Back Issues of the Middle School Journal

Vol. X-XV (1979-1984).....\$15.00 ea. volume
Vol. VIII & IX (1977-1978).....10.00 ea. volume
Vol. VI & VII.....6.00 ea. volume
Vol. V (1974).....7.00 ea. volume
Vol. IV (1973).....9.00 ea. volume
Vol. I-III (1970-1972, a composite).....10.00

Prices subject to change.

Discounts are available on quantity orders of the same title to a single address.

Annual membership (Sept.—August) including subscription to *Middle School Journal*, newsletter, bonus publication and other benefits, \$35.00. Subscription to *Journal* only, \$15.00.

NMSA, P.O. Box 14882, Columbus, Ohio 43214
(614) 263-5407



**NATIONAL
Middle
school
ASSOCIATION**